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SOVIET LITERATURE

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SOVIET LITERATURE

AN ANTHOLOGY

Edited and Translated by
GEORGE REAVEY & MARC SLONIM



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GLOSSARY

A great number of abbreviations have come into common use both in the written and spoken language of contemporary Russia. But, though they give a definite raciness to the style, it has been decided to translate them wherever possible for the convenience of the reader. Below is a list of the more common, which have been retained in the text, with their English equivalents.

Agitvan	Propaganda van touring the country.
Comsomol	Organization of Young Communists.
Constructivists	Members of an artistic movement who advocated rational planning.
Cultvan	A propaganda van touring the villages with literature of all sorts for the enlightenment of the peasants.
Gubnarobraz	Provincial Popular Educational Establishment.
Gubcheka	Provincial Political Police Headquarters.
NEP	New Economic Policy.
Predzavcom	Chairman of Factory Committee.
Tcheka	Political Police, now become the O.G.P.U., known in Russia as the Gaypayoo.
Troika	Committee of Three, charged to supervise liquidation of illiteracy.
Sovnarcom	Soviet People's Commissar.
Upravdom	Chief of House Committee. Every house has its committee, elected by the tenants, who are responsible for its repairs and general upkeep.
Zavcom	Factory Committee.

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

THE aim of this book is other than to serve as an anthology of Soviet stories. It differs from collections of such stories so far published in France, Germany, Italy, and England in that it attempts to offer the reader a comprehensive panorama of Soviet literature since 1917, a panorama composed of organically inter-related events in Prose, Poetry, and Criticism, and intended to illustrate the new spirit in Russian literature. It was the compilers' particular concern to bridge the gap left by the Revolution in the mind of the European reader who had just become familiar with Tchekhov, and who was then brought face to face with the work of a Pilnyak, Babel, or Fadeyev. It is for the sake of this continuity that older but less widely known writers like Biely and Remizov have been included, whereas Maxim Gorky, already frequently translated, has been omitted. Similarly, and according to their ideas of historical and psychological perspective, the compilers have taken care to situate and annotate the selected texts in a manner to make the literary evolution of the last sixteen years clear even to the reader but little acquainted with the intricacies and byzantinisms of Soviet literature. In planning the anthology, the compilers have kept in view and have attempted to combine three sets of factors: chronology, historical phases, and literary and ideological groupings. They have also been guided by the criterion of literary quality, which explains the preponderance of Fellow-Travellers as against Proletarian writers, though the best of these latter are as prominently presented.

An anthology of this nature has only lately become possible, for the phases and inner demarcations of Soviet literature lacked definition until the Five-Year Plan had given it added continuity and made its plot more dramatic. I remember how much less organic and exciting Soviet literature appeared when, before the consolidation of the Five-Year Plan in literature, I had to compile a Soviet section for Mr. Samuel Putnam's *European Caravan*. Conscious also of the advantages of collaboration in this delicate task, and aware of the frequent difficulty of getting hold of necessary texts, I sought, as soon as I had formulated the idea of this anthology, the collaboration

of the distinguished Russian critic, Mr. Marc Slonim. Our first task was to draw up a satisfactory plan and then to apportion the labour. Mr. Slonim undertook to write the Introduction on the basis of our plan, to provide most of the biographical material, and to write the foreword to the critical section, while to my share fell the translation, the final selection of texts, and the writing of the forewords to the prose and poetry sections. If there exists any slight difference of opinion between Mr. Slonim and myself, it resides in that I am prepared to believe in the success of the Five-Year Plan in literature, at least in so far as it helped to define and make Soviet literature more homogeneous.

Our thanks are due to Mr. Alec Brown for allowing us to reprint his original version of Pilnyak's "Train 57," which had been censored by its American publisher, and also for his translations of Fadeyev and Pasternak's "Storm at Sea"; and also to Mr. R. Spector for his translations of Kaverin's "The Return of the Kirghiz" and Gladkov's "Power."

I would add that where poetry is concerned, I have been at pains to preserve the original rhythm, and to translate as directly and literally as possible, abandoning in most cases any attempt at rhyme. The reader must take it on good faith that the poets of the Futurist school, like Mayakovsky, Chlebnikov, Pasternak, and Tsvetaeva, are full of subtle phonetic effects which it is impossible to render, even very approximately. I shall not excuse myself from partiality here, but I do believe that the poets included represent what is important in poetry since 1917. I regret most the omission of Mandelstam, Bagritzky, and Antokolsky.

In the same way, for various reasons, the principal of which was the limited space at our disposal, we must regret the omission of the prose writers: Maxim Gorky, Malyshev, Vesioly, Romanov, Alexei Tolstoy, Lidin, Tinyanov, Libedinsky, and Shaginyan; and of the critics: Eichenbaum, Tinyanov, Voronsky, Trotsky, and Averbakh.

Our acknowledgments are also due to the following reviews which have published poems or stories included in the anthology: *Experiment*, *This Quarter*, *The New Review*, *Contempo*, the *Adelphi*, and the *Fortnightly Review*.

GEORGE REAVEY.

THE NEW SPIRIT IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE¹

I. FOREWORD

Soviet literature as material for the study of U.S.S.R.

THOSE desirous of forming some clear notion of Soviet Russia very often commit the serious mistake of relying exclusively upon social and political information, statistics, and the impressions of foreign travellers. They very seldom have recourse to Soviet literature. And yet, for the understanding of the significance of the Russian Revolution and of the psychology of the new Russian man, it is indispensable to turn to present-day Soviet poetry and prose. Formerly, the works of Turgenev and Tolstoy, of Dostoevsky and Tchekhov, painted for the stranger a vivid picture of nineteenth-century Russia. Soviet literature has not produced such considerable artists, but it provides a no less rich and precious material. This literature portrays not only the outward changes and adjustments which have taken place since the Revolution, but it also reflects those submarine spiritual and mental currents which stir in the depths of the turbulent Russian sea and which may determine the future fate of the country and its people.

A study of Soviet literature, however, presents certain serious difficulties. It has, since 1917, covered a ground of development which in ordinary times would have taken several decades. Schools and movements have supplanted each other with cinematographic rapidity. A series of ideological and stylistic problems were given a hurried solution in an attempt to adapt them to new forms of life. And the very composition of its rank and file has been almost entirely renewed, so that young men absolutely unknown to the pre-War reader stood out as its chief representatives during the first years of the Revolution. The conflict of literary currents was complicated by the attempt to establish a purely bolshevist art emancipated from the past and answering both in form and content the strivings of the age. Russian literature underwent a stylistic revolution,

¹ Translated, and sometimes adapted, from the Russian, with notes, by George Reavey.

the underlying motifs of which were a blend of evolving artistic forms and of outward political pressure.

To disentangle the threads of this variegated and conflicting material, and to distinguish the accidental from the permanent, we have to keep in view a double stage-setting—that of the purely artistic process of Russian literary evolution and that of the particular environment in which it has found expression since the Revolution. Nor should we overlook the fact that much of what superficial observers will claim to be revolutionary innovation was already latent in the past, and was bound sooner or later to come to the surface. The Revolution only quickened and defined the birth of these new elements in life and art.

2. LITERARY CURRENTS IN RUSSIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Symbolism and Realism. Traditional Revivals. Futurism. The disintegration of classical realism. The Neo-Realists.

Symbolism and traditional Realism were the two fundamental tendencies in Russian literature in the first decade of our century.

The symbolists, after a long and contested fight against classical and popular poetry, became undisputed masters of the poetic field. They brought Russian verse to an unparalleled degree of perfection and musicality, and could boast of such masters as Balmont, Briusov, V. Ivanov, Sologub, and, finally, Alexander Blok, who stood out as the most considerable poet of his time.

Symbolism, in its turn, manifested two directions. The first, an æsthetic direction, laid stress on refinement of form and on the imaging of rare and extraordinary experiences. The second, a religious-mystical direction, hovered in abstract spheres, talked in terms of misty symbols and undefined dreams, but also displayed a profound anguish and alarm.¹ The art of the Symbolist school might be taken to represent the last flowering of that lofty, hermetic, and non-popular culture which the Russian intelligentsia had, upon its absorption of the best

¹ This alarm is very evident in Blok's *New America*, written in 1913.

elements of the gentry, created in the nineteenth century. The symbolist circles might be compared to sects of æsthetes and sages who, paying no heed to the noise and bustle of vulgar life, chanted the glories of the gods of Beauty and Thought in the calm of their artistic watch-towers. But other notes forced themselves into this aloof, aristocratic poetry. Blok expressed in his remarkable poems that dim and growing presentiment of the end which began to sound in the works of his contemporaries before the War. It was not by chance that he said, addressing his Muse: "Your mysterious refrains bear the tidings of fateful destruction."

New and hostile tendencies manifested themselves at the very moment of the symbolist victory. A strong movement in favour of simplicity and concreteness made itself felt in the years 1910-11 among the poets of Moscow and especially of Petersburg. Gumilev combats the wavering femininity of Symbolism with poems of masculine decision. Achmatova, turning her back on solemnity and loftiness of style, writes laconic, lyrical, and almost colloquial verse. Mandelstam, defending the verbal concreteness and expressiveness as against vagueness and lulling musicality, entitled a book of his *Stone*. Other poetic groups sprang up by the side of this *acmeist*¹ movement. It was *Futurism*, however, that was destined to play the most important part. Chlebnikov and Mayakovsky, its originators, had, in 1912, guessed at the necessity of some artistic regeneration, but they had evolved no clear programme as yet. The obscure, stammering, and deeply talented Chlebnikov made a savage onslaught on grammar and syntax, while the stentorian Mayakovsky overwhelmed the reader with manifestos demanding the destruction of the old and made a parade of coarse expressions and insolent behaviour. Futurism, apart from its tricks and artifices, expressed a real hankering after life, after a flesh-and-blood art which would dispose of both the pale æstheticism of the symbolists and the dry academism of the classics.

The situation of prose was even more complicated. On the one hand, there was Symbolism, represented by Andrei Biely, Sologub, and to some extent by Andreyev, and, on the other, a strong tradition of Realism which was deeply rooted in the

¹ *Acmeism*: this was the name of the group founded by Gumilev in 1910, and which included Achmatova, Mandelstam, and Gorodetsky.

nineteenth century, and which flourished on the heritage of the Russian psychological novel and its great masters, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the realist tradition had received a new impetus from Tchekhovian impressionism, which confirmed the short-story genre in Russian literature, and from Gorkian romanticism, which painted in vivid colours the revolt of the individual against his social environment. Bunin, Kuprin, and Korolenko were the outstanding exponents of early twentieth-century classical Realism. The young pre-War generation of writers, like Remizov, Zamyatin, and Alexei Tolstoy, felt the strong influence of Symbolism and was attempting to blend tradition and novelty. The traditional element resided in the portrayal of concrete actuality as a protest against the abstract psychological researches and fantasy of the Symbolists. The young Neo-Realists, as they might be called, depicted Russian provincial life, popular types, and the trifles of everyday existence. They employed, however, many of the Symbolist devices—devices which Andrei Biely had turned to such brilliant account in his novels, and which might be summed up to consist of rhythmic prose,¹ linguistic innovation, the blending of realistic and fantastical elements, the stylization of actuality, compactness, the banishment of objective detail, and the stressing of lyrical and individual narrative notes. Thus by 1912–15 Russian literature had seen the birth of Neo-Realism, which was fated to become the principal direction of post-Revolutionary prose. It might with reason be asserted that the present-day “Soviet novel” has descended directly from Symbolism, after mastering it and borrowing many of its elements. But that which the future historian will term “the disintegration of classical Realism” had already become a fact before the Revolution.

These pre-Revolutionary literary battles, manifestos, and stylistic researches gave evidence, in face of the criticism and derision they provoked, of healthy and serious intent. A section of the Symbolists, the Futurists, and the young prose writers, became convinced, in those years of constrained foreboding

¹ A veritable, and almost chaotic, wave of rhythmic prose swept Russian literature in the early 'twenties. This was, of course, due to Biely's influence. It is interesting to observe that Kataev, who began with realism, arrives at a lyrical note in his Five-Year Plan novel *Speed Up, Time!*

(1912-16), that art, as well as Russia itself, was on the brink of two epochs, and they instinctively prepared the ground for some as yet undefined but inevitable break.

3. THE DISLOCATION OF LITERARY LIFE 1917-1919

Blok's Twelve. Messianic poetry. Revolutionary and religious Messianism. Literary groups in 1920-21. The programme of the Futurists and the work of Mayakovsky. Imagism and the poetry of Esenin.

This break came with the first shots of the Revolution. The war had already interrupted the normal current of literary life, but the Revolution in its early years inflicted a well-nigh mortal blow. In 1918-19 art suffered the equivalent of material annihilation. All reviews stopped publication. The old newspapers ceased to exist. Printing-presses were confiscated and became government property. The annual output of books fell to two thousand in 1920 as against thirty-four thousand in 1913, and the majority of those books were of a propagandist nature. All cultural problems fell into the background before the whirlwind of political events and social dislocation. The civil war, which was devastating two-thirds of Russian territory, made all thought of to-morrow and of continuous creative effort precarious. The Terror and emigration, famine and sickness, as well as partisanship in the Red or White armies, thinned the ranks of the literary groups. *Silent Musæ inter arma*: the Latin adage rang true and literature for the moment seemed superfluous. The writers, too, reduced to the position of simple citizens, found themselves superfluous.

Profound disenchantment gripped many, and rage and hatred blinded many others, who sought salvation in emigrating. Others again repudiated their past and began to remodel their lives. The problems which had agitated and tormented a whole generation of Russian intellectuals and writers had, of a sudden, lost all interest and had been turned to ashes in the fires of Revolution. Former themes and habitual heroes disappeared as if by magic, recent disputes seemed meaningless, and the habitual reader and familiar critic had also mysteriously vanished.

In the twinkling of an eye all relationships had changed, all authorities had grown dim, all the statues in the gardens of Russian literature had been smashed. Everything had to be built anew and built upon the site of the conflagration.

It was in those years of devastation and terror, in the midst of an almost universal silence, that Blok raised his voice, which resounded like the promise of a new literature of the future. It was Blok, the leader of the Symbolists, and a symbol himself of a whole epoch of culture, who was fated to begin a new page in Russian literature, and, standing in the past and yet foreseeing the future, to bridge the gap between the old and new Russias. A wonderful lyric poet, Blok had sung the dream and passions of a generation; he foresaw the Revolution and welcomed it. His poem, *The Twelve*,¹ published in 1918 after *The Scythians*, pictured the riotous sweep of the revolutionary elements. The heroes of the poem are Red soldiers, who march light-heartedly to plunder and murder. They march through a Petersburg blizzard as bandits and dreamers inspired by hatred of the bourgeois world and by a confused belief in a better life. Christ Himself may be their invisible leader and inspirer. Thus the twelve bandits become identified with the twelve apostles, and out of the blood and filth of the Terror and anarchy emerges the image of a new Evangel, justifying all the cruelty and destruction of Bolshevism.

Blok, in his *Twelve*, had propounded the question of the significance of the Russian Revolution. He had already touched upon this question in his remarkable poem, *The Scythians*. In this poem the Russians are represented as Scythians and Asiatics; they are capable of appreciating and loving the West, and they are ready to co-operate for the good of the world and humanity, but woe to the West if it refuses to respond to the Russian call and attend "the feast of work and peace." Then the united hordes of Scythians would sweep in an avalanche upon the doomed plains of Europe and would devastate the old and dying world of Western civilization.

The impression made by Blok's poems was tremendous. With extraordinary poetic force they reflected the temper of the first Bolshevik phase. At that time both the leaders and the masses believed that the fire lighted in Moscow would set the

¹ The twelfth and last section of this poem is printed on page 338.

whole world ablaze. And speeches might be heard in the cities and villages proclaiming Russia as the saviour of humanity and the builder of a new life.

This *Messianism* was responsible for a series of important poems in the years 1918-20. Andrei Biely in his poem, *Christ is Risen* (1918), asserted that Russia's sufferings were Golgotha, were necessary for the salvation of mankind, and that the now crucified Christ would be resurrected in Russia. Essenin's attempt at Messianism in his *Inonia* (1918) begins with a bombastic threat to God and ends with the image of an idyllic "village" paradise. Maximilian Voloshin, in his poems about Stenka Razin¹ and other historical personages attempted to show that the Russian Revolution was deeply national, and that the Bolshevik drive and Utopianism corresponded to inborn national tendencies. And, like Blok, he felt the necessity of understanding and justifying the blood and cruelty of the actual environment in which Terror and the instincts of heedless destruction reigned for the time being.

Blok's and Voloshin's works were, for the most part, in the Symbolist tradition. But Blok's symbolism and mysticism blended with acute realism; his abrupt, intermittent rhythm, too, answered the dynamism of the epoch. Blok gave the signal for a literary revival and there followed what a Soviet critic has termed "the café phase" of Russian literature. For want of editorial premises and reviews, writers used to gather in the Moscow and Petrograd cafés and read their works to their friends and the public. A multitude of groups sprang up, and each dreamt of regenerating Russian literature. They displayed for the most part a Messianic or a Heroic temper, but turned their backs upon Symbolist mysticism, stressing purely revolutionary problems or keeping pace with the Revolution by coining hyperboles. Thus a "Cosmist" poet wrote the lines: "We shall first overturn the earth, and then we shall stage a rebellion of stars."

The younger poets wrote either under the influence of Blok or that of Gumilev, who was shot in 1922 for participation in a monarchist plot, and who by an irony of fate has considerably

¹ The myth of Stenka Razin and Pugatchev as national heroes enjoyed a wide currency in the early years of the Revolution. Numerous poems testify to this.

influenced Proletarian writers. He was poles apart from Messianism, either Revolutionary or Mystical. He summoned the dreamer into an austere world of virile combat, and demanded of his disciples compactness and precision, a conquering will and a major note. Many of the trumpet calls of the period of Militant Communism were written in the precise and virile rhythms of Gumilev's verse. But it is the talented poet, Nicolai Tikhonov, who proved Gumilev's most important disciple.

In 1920-21 this new Poetry (there was scarcely any Prose in those years!) fell under the strong influence of Futurism and Imagism. These tendencies were personified by Mayakovsky and Essenin respectively, the two outstanding poets of the first Revolutionary period, who later outgrew the schools they had founded.

Futurism made its second public appearance in 1918-19, and its thunders sounded particularly loud amid the general silence. It renewed its declaration of war against old art and appropriated to itself the functions of expressing the Revolution and of interpreting the new utilitarian and social theories of poetry. In his famous *Command to the Arts Armies*, No. 1, Mayakovsky called his comrades to the political and æsthetic barricades, declaring that the poet's task was to be the drummer of the Revolution: "Streets are our brushes, squares our palettes." He demanded an onslaught against the classics, a war against æstheticism, lyricism, beauty, and other similar "bourgeois prejudices." Futurism was to "spit on rhymes, arias, rose-bushes and other trash." The new art was to sing mines, machines, mass rebellion, and the bustle of cities.¹

Mayakovsky is an outstanding example of reaction against Symbolism, against its airiness, musicality, and isolation. His language was coarse, pungent, and colloquial, his rhythm was militant and emphatic, and his effects crudely expressive, based upon street jokes and poster vividness. Mayakovsky's poetry is essentially declamatory, and belongs to the street and platform; his words are emphatic and weighty, his similes material, rough and ready, and he intersperses circus jokes with political quips and newspaper sensations.

Mayakovsky made his mark in Russian poetry in those years

¹ The reader will find Pasternak's retrospective pages in *The Death of a Poet* of peculiar interest in this connection.

of battle when the poet's rôle was to rouse men to battle or to celebrate victories. Subsequently, he devoted his raucous voice and great inventive talent to the service of the Revolution, and to his very death he continued apostrophizing all the wrongs of the day: he wrote verses about bread prices, the New Economic Policy, the food supply, international events, the Chinese Revolution, and a party comb-out. He wished to turn literature into a kind of social function, the significance of which would depend on the benefit it brought the State. "Poetry begins with tendenciousness," he once remarked in his paradoxical way, and at one moment he discussed the necessity of supplanting literature by the newspaper. He warred against sensibility, meditation, and tenderness in art, although he himself proved to be their greatest victim, for he finally perished by his own hand because "he had set his heel upon the throat of his own song."¹ He admitted only one kind of romanticism, that of mass movements and class war, and he narrated in his usual hyperbolical and sweeping style how the "150,000,000" Ivans win over America to communism. This was his own tribute to Messianism. Mayakovsky, by stressing the communal function of poetry, exercised an enormous influence on Soviet literature. He personified the new generation, its revolutionary materialism and contempt of sentiment, its striving towards collective construction and love of big numbers. His motto of participation in social creation and in life generally by way of poetry was enthusiastically adopted by dozens of young poets. Imitation of Mayakovsky has become a common feature of Soviet poetry. Poets like Asseyev, Bezimensky, and Ushakov depend almost entirely on Mayakovsky. But none of them can equal the energy of his words, the dynamism of his rhythms, and the impetuousness of his clarion voice.

Mayakovsky and his disciples, of course, assured the final defeat of Symbolism. And it is interesting to note that Essenin's poetry, a current diametrically opposed to that of Mayakovsky's, also sprang from the reaction from Symbolism.

Essenin came to the front in 1920-21 as the spokesman of the Imagist movement, which reproached the Futurists for for-

¹ Mayakovsky's suicide was a great shock to Soviet literature. It is an interesting case of sentiment, eliminated from poetry, becoming a suicidal obsession in life.

getting that the "image" was the quintessence of poetry. The Imagists hoped to reform poetry by the creation of fresh images, unexpected similes, and daring metaphors, all profoundly hostile to the Symbolist stylistic tradition. Essenin's significance, however, does not reside in his stylistic innovations. For just as Mayakovsky may be said to typify the dynamism of Bolshevik assertion and to prove the poet of the city and the worker, so Essenin, a peasant by birth, stands out as the poet of peasant Russia and of that spiritual schism, which was, in those years, common to both intellectuals and peasant representatives.

It was his heavy lot, in those years of tragedy and brazen war, to be a purely lyric poet, with a bent for elegy and a thirst for idyll and calm. His poems of, very often, coarse pathos are always haunted by the image, and at the same time mirage, of a reminiscent and yet ideal "village," whose dawns, fields, cows, and horses replenished his stock of images. He sang all the themes that make a lyric poet, in days when the lyric of individual sufferings was condemned to cede its place to the thundering orchestra of collective man. He sometimes attempted to keep up with the times and read Marx, but more often he was driven to "drowning his eyes in the fumes of wine," driven, like François Villon, to an underworld in which he likened himself to a bandit and cursed, sang, and lamented his fate and the woes of the day. His greatest enemy was the machine, that "iron guest" which menaced the village of his dreams with destruction and his own life with annihilation. He foretold his own death in many poems, and at last took his own "superfluous" life in December 1925.¹

Essenin's influence is attributable not only to his considerable talents but also to the fact that his poems, as contrasted with Symbolist sophistries, Futurist war-whoops, and the theoretical argumentativeness of other revolutionary movements, spoke of simple human sufferings and told of the tragedy of a personality which was unable to adapt itself to the necessities of a historical schism. By nature a purely lyric poet, Essenin was given stature by the Revolution; for his personal tragedy and eloquent fate

¹ Essenin's suicide tended to have a disintegrating influence, and Communist writers were ordered to combat this. Mayakovsky was one of the poets who took pains to contradict Essenin's dying words. This did not prevent his committing suicide five years later.

make of his poetry a striking symbol of the fateful clash of two implacable worlds.¹

4. THE THEORY OF PROLETARIAN ART

The activity of the Proletcult. The new writers. Disputes as to the nature of proletarian art. The conflict between the moderate and left wings. The beginning of NEP and the Fellow-Travelers' "Charter of Liberty."

On coming to power in 1917, the Bolsheviks proclaimed that Communist culture was to supplant bourgeois culture. The Soviet theoreticians, basing their arguments upon the Marxist assumption that environment determines consciousness, *e.g.* that every culture is the expression of a given social-economic order and the creation of a definite class, concluded that the new proletarian régime must be reflected by a corresponding proletarian culture, *e.g.* by a science, art, and literature which should be motivated by proletarian ideology and tendencies.

This theory asserted from the very beginning that proletarian art was inevitable in so far as a Communist Revolution had been realized in Russia. This historical fatalism imbued proletarian writers and critics with a profound faith in their own convictions and justness. They were convinced that their creations would revolutionize literature as profoundly as the Bolsheviks had revolutionized the social-political order. The analogy was pushed even farther: the same battles had to be fought against bourgeois ideology and counter-revolutionary tendencies and the same measures of irreconcilability, compulsion, and terror employed in art as in life. Thus a policy of prohibition was applied to the old and politically suspect writers, and they were faced with censorship, interdiction, abuse, and even police interference. The hopes of the new communist literature, on the other hand, received every stimulus. Already in 1920, the famous organization of the *Proletcult* was founded, the purpose of which was to direct the fight for proletarian culture on an international scale. By the

¹ The machine was Essenin's, as D. H. Lawrence's, most avowed enemy. They have that in common. Essenin was elementary, Lawrence a theoretician by comparison.

efforts of such prominent members of the Russian Communist Party as Lunacharsky, Kogan, Bucharin, Fritche and others, fifteen reviews, various editorial boards, literary and artistic circles, and several public institutes were founded. The membership of these bodies was enrolled chiefly from young poets and prose writers of proletarian origin. All their productions were immediately printed. This movement was subsidized by the government, and these subsidies permitted the establishment of numerous groups and circles, of which few have survived, but which were fated to play an important part in the development of Soviet literature.

In this way the material revival of literary life had assumed the character of a proletarian attack. This fact ensured the final and physical elimination of the older generation of writers, and favoured the literary activity of new writers. This phenomenon might be called "the renewal of the literary personnel."

In 1920-22 Proletarian creative verse expressed itself best in the lyric form, which was an instantaneous reflex most appropriate in a period of rapidly changing events. It was unanimously admitted that the new literature ought to reflect actuality, raise the problems which excited the masses, and be charged with a social-political content. The "astounding revolution of artistic methods," prophesied by the poet Gastev, did not come about. Instead, writers began to dispute the direction to be taken by proletarian literature. Thus the "Smithy" argued for epic and monumental art, the "October Group" tended towards romanticism, and the "Futurists" put forward the thesis of rationalistic constructivism. Many of the young proletarian poets merely fell into empty rhetoric and hardly anything of value has survived of all the creation of those proletarian workshops. The most prominent representatives of this movement, poets like Obradovitch, Alexandrovsky, Sannikov, Zharov, and Gastev, play an almost negligible part in the later development of Soviet literature. At their best, they followed in the wake of Blok, Gumilev, Mayakovsky, and Essenin, but their importance lies in the general anti-symbolist, civic and realistic tendency which they exhibited.

The same holds true of prose. Writers like Furmanov and Neverov, to mention only the most talented writers, who came forward in 1920-22, contributed no innovation of style and only

expressed the general tendency towards concrete portrayal of events and ideological interpretation.

Already by 1921 the disputes between the various groups and the unsatisfactory attempts to create a proletarian literature had disenchanted the Proletcult theoreticians. A dispute on literary politics arose in the bosom of the Communist Party itself. Two schools of thought soon manifested themselves. The moderate school, headed by Trotsky, Lunacharsky and Voronsky came to the conclusion that many elements had to be taken from bourgeois art and literature and that it was impossible to create a proletarian literature by purely exterior governmental means. "To demand the immediate birth of a genuine proletarian culture," Lunacharsky declared, "is to demand a miracle." And Trotsky, in his *Literature and Revolution* (1923), a book which exercised an important influence on the solution of the dispute, argued that literary dominion was "gained" by high-class artistic products rather than by theoretical manifestos. "The issue between bourgeois and proletarian art depends on quality." And Voronsky opened *Krasnaya Nov*, the review which had been founded on the suggestion of Gorky and Lenin, to non-proletarian writers, who later came to be called *Poputchiki* (Fellow-Travellers).

The extremists, on the contrary, wished to preserve the Soviet Parnassus free from all "non-party" elements. They held much the same ground as the LEF (Left Front), organized by Mayakovsky, and which assumed that only the Futurists and their friends were on the way to realizing genuine revolutionary slogans in literature, and they even branded as retrograde the proletarian writers who favoured realism. The "On Guard" group frankly favoured the idea of a "literary dictatorship," and claimed that public political utility was the only criterion of art. In spite of the fact that the extremist section included a considerable number of prominent Communist critics and politicians, the dispute ended in the victory of the moderate wing. This coincided with the beginning of NEP (New Economic Policy): the period of Militant Communism had come to an end, and the "heroic epoch" of the civil wars was succeeded by the prosaic Mondays of civic reconstruction, of national farming under conditions of free exchange and diminished terror and compulsion. The years 1922-25 saw the factual

application of the policy which later came to be formulated in a special Party resolution which stated: "There is no hegemony as yet of proletarian writers, and the Party ought to help these writers to earn for themselves the right to this hegemony. The Party must fight against all thoughtless or contemptuous treatment of the old cultural heritage as well as of the literary specialists . . . it must also fight against a purely hot-house proletarian literature." The necessity, too, of "the free rivalry of various tendencies and groups in the literary sphere was admitted."

In practice this meant that the conflict between writers was now transferred to the ground of artistic mastery. This measure had also been made all the more necessary by the fact that the great majority of writers, both young and old, belonged neither to the Communist Party nor to the ranks of the proletariat. These writers were given the special name of *Poputchiki* (Fellow-Travellers), that is, writers who are marching with the Revolution, although they cannot claim to be real revolutionaries or bolsheviks.

In this NEP period Soviet literature takes a great stride forward and produces a number of considerable artists. The number of reviews and journals increases, and so does the activity of the *Gosizdat* (State Publishing House); by 1927 book production reaches its pre-War norm, and later exceeds it. Such are the outward signs of literary revival. In this epoch (1922-28) appear the first outstanding prose and poetic works of Soviet literature.

5. THE BEGINNINGS OF SOVIET PROSE

The theory and practice of Tendencious Naturalism. The work of Vsevolod Ivanov. The literature of fact and of everyday anecdote. Romanov and Seifulina. Gladkov's novels. The reaction against Naturalism. The return to Psychological Realism. The works of Fadeyev, Sholohov and Libedinsky.

The first Soviet prose works, which in 1921 began to displace lyrical effusions, bore a markedly naturalistic character. Life offered such colourful, and, at times, improbable material, advanced such themes, and had in it so much of the comic and

heroic, so much movement and adventure, that it seemed the writer had nothing left to do but record this reel of events and so become a faithful chronicler of his time. Literature became preoccupied with an exact rendering of actuality, which comprised the romanticism and blood of the civil war as well as the portrayal of the changing conditions of existence and psychology which the Revolution had brought about in the villages and provinces. This attempt at an exact description of revolutionary holidays and working days was also made by some of the writers of the older generation. Thus Veresayev, in his novel, *The Blind Lane*, described the doubts of the intelligentsia in the years of terror and war, while Serafimovitch portrayed the communist bravery of the workers in his epic, *The Iron Torrent*.

The younger writers, by way of contrast, painted their realistic pictures in special colours. They wrote in an abrupt, almost coarse, language, and tried to find some correspondence between the facts they were communicating and the style of their presentation. Hence their partiality for naturalistic detail, a certain parade of scenes of murder, violation and riot, and their stressing of the elemental features of purely popular dialects and their neglect of psychological portraiture.

Vsevolod Ivanov is, perhaps, the most typical and brilliant of these writers. He owes his fame to his tales of the partisan movement in Siberia, with their blend of European and Asiatic elements. His heroes are peasants, simple and mighty as Nature, and they act rather than think or reason. This simplicity and force are Ivanov's chief asset.

Almost all the early Soviet prose works mingle extreme naturalism with a broad, sweeping method of presentation, impressionism, and coarseness and dynamism of style. They have all the refreshing strength and full-bloodedness which are often conspicuously absent in the more finished works of contemporary Europe. But very often this material was given no artistic form, and therefore remains but a record of the time.

Some proletarian authors deliberately avoided transforming their material and aimed at being faithful chroniclers. They even favoured a theory which regarded literature as a kind of medical report. Thus 1923 saw the revival of Zola's naturalistic theory

in Soviet Russia. But while nineteenth-century French Naturalism strove to be objective, the left wing of the Soviet writers demanded the unfailing expression of a political tendency. We might therefore call this new genre "Tendencious Naturalism." It gradually discovered its own characteristics and heroes: these latter of the type of the incorruptible Communist with a steel will and unwavering convictions, or of the self-denying woman who realizes a life of free love and of comradeship in work.

The description of events and facts continued the tradition of faithful notation, but the characters tended to become banal and lifeless, while the argument invariably reduced itself to official optimism and Communist slogans. Gladkov's *Cement* (1926), which describes the civil war and the first attempts at industrial construction in a tone of heightened Communist enthusiasm, is a typical example of this sort of literature. Gladkov's heroes are workers who, after taking up their rifles against the White generals, must now return to the more prosaic occupations of everyday national reconstruction.

The transition from the "heroic" to the everyday was beset with difficulties. Former Red commanders had to become mill managers. Lenin had declared that Communists ought to learn to trade. And the battles of the day had now to be fought for bread, for coal, for the construction of cement factories and for the liquidation of illiteracy. The conflicts which developed under these conditions proved more complex than those between Reds and Whites. For the whole social structure was in process of transformation. Writers watched the development of new relations, and their Naturalism assumed more and more the character of social description, and, at times, even that of a naturalistic anecdote. Writers of this type were differentiated only by the political tendency with which they coloured their facts. P. Romanov is one of the outstanding writers of this *byt*, or social type of literature. His stories of 1923-28 are almost verbatim reports of conversations which he had overheard in the villages, in the factories, in the theatres, or at meetings, and which reflect the thoughts, anxieties, and worries of the Soviet citizens. But Romanov also attempts to describe the living people of his day, and he underlines those psychological changes which are manifest in the younger Soviet generation. Of particular interest are those of his works which depict the

new type of man, with his materialistic attitude to love and contempt of sensibility and spiritual tenderness.

This naturalistic social literature branched off on several themes and has given an enormous output. There are tales of the *village* (Nikitin, Seifulina, Karavaev, Panferov); novels of the *Party* (Libedinsky, Bachmetiev, Tarasov-Rodionov); of *proletarian life* (Semeonov, Gladkov, Bessalko); of *provincial life* (Evdokimov, Neverov); and the portraiture of the *kulaks* and *nepmen* of the 1922-28 period (Kozirev, Lidin). But it soon became evident that neither the literature of fact nor tendentious realism was capable of producing works of high artistic quality, or works which corresponded with the fundamental tendencies of Russian art. A discussion ensued on the best way of representing reality. As this dispute has not yet been settled, no final victory can be ascribed to one or the other current of Soviet literature.

Communist theoreticians had, at the very beginning of the Revolution, demanded that Bolshevik literature should finish with psychological analyses and the "individual experiences" of bourgeois art. In their opinion this literature ought to show man in action, and in relation to his comrades and society; that is, as a "social being." Thus their fundamental conception of literature was as of a broad canvas of social events upon which the personality figures as a part of the whole, as a clue to the dialectical law of economic development. Rationalism, that is, an ideological and rationally verified approach to reality and consciousness, and the banishment of instinctive and sub-conscious romanticism, was also expected of Bolshevik writers.

But the application of this formula proved disastrous and produced little better than dry political tracts. The stormy reaction against "tendentious rationalism" was evidenced not only in the fact that theoretical disputes became the order of the day in all the literary organizations, but also by the best writers swinging decisively to the side of the psychological representation of "living man." Truth in art, in the sense in which Tolstoy understood this, became the slogan of the opponents of the tendentious portraiture of men and events.

Thus, strangely enough, it was this return to Tolstoyan realism which proved the strongest movement among proletarian writers. If we examine the works of the best of them

we shall see that they overcame the bare social record and tendencious naturalism by resuming the psychological tradition of the Russian novel. Like Fadeyev, in his *Rout*,¹ one of the most brilliant of Soviet novels, they attempted to portray living flesh-and-blood people on a background of revolutionary events. It is man that steps into the foreground, man with all the thoughts and passions that define him in relation to the Revolution and his participation in it. Fadeyev's *Rout* and *The Last of the Udegs* are, even in their heavy and unornamental style, clearly imitations of Tolstoy. This is also true of Sholohov's novels, in which the author describes the civil war in the Don region in the form of a long epic structurally reminiscent of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Sholohov shows himself an able exponent of the Tolstoyan method in both his novels, *Silent Flows the Don* and *Virgin Soil*, in which latter he depicts the introduction of the collective farm system and the anti-kulak campaign in the Cossack villages. The same may be said of Libedinsky's novel, *The Birth of a Hero* (1930), which provoked embittered disputes because the author had portrayed a trusted Communist from the point of view of his love-affairs rather than that of his Party work.

Now Fadeyev, Sholohov, and Libedinsky, as well as many other exponents of Psychological Realism, are proletarian writers. By their origin and social position they were intended to open the way to a new art, but they have, as a matter of fact, shown themselves the continuators of a literary tradition and have displayed much less interest in innovations of form and artistic structure than the so-called "Fellow-Travellers." They had, of course, felt the influence of the formal researches and stylistic experiments which were going on around them, for Soviet literature, in spite of its divisions, may be compared to the current of a single river in which flow other distinct but inter-communicating streams.

¹ Translated into English under the meaningless title of *The Nineteen*.

6. THE PRECURSORS OF THE STYLISTIC REVOLUTION—ANDREI BIELY AND ALEXEI REMIZOV

The vernacular in the works of Soviet writers. Ethnographic literature.

The Fellow-Travellers, as those writers are called who have not formally joined the Communist Party, form the real vanguard of Soviet literature, and they have both quantity and quality on their side. It is they who have determined the broad lines of prose development in the last fifteen years. It is they, too, who have continued those researches after a new style which were already the feature of Russian literature before the war.

Two writers of the older generation, Andrei Biely and Alexei Remizov, have exercised a tremendous influence on contemporary Russian prose, and appear as forerunners of many of its present-day representatives.

Andrei Biely¹ (b. 1880), a mystic and one of the leaders of the Symbolist movement, a friend of Blok's and a religious thinker, has, in his novels, reached the heights of Neologism. Biely, like a clever juggler, submits the word, which has become in his hands a purely sonorous and plastic instrument, to all conceivable experiments. Biely's word, become the symbol of gesture, is dynamic and forms itself onomatopoeically out of word-roots without regard to grammatical rules, and is thus the agent of a stylistic revolution. This essentially rhythmic prose, with its assonance and play of meanings, expresses the slightest and least perceptible shades of spiritual life, and at times even attempts to communicate states of being existing beyond our consciousness.

The composition of Biely's novels is as complex as his style. He deliberately mixes the planes of action and offers the reader a series of distinct episodes which proffer a clue only at the very end of the work. Thus a symphony is finally born of these impetuous and fragmentary chords. Biely, in a preface to a recent book of his, proclaims himself a poet and states that he writes in prose form in order to save paper. His lyricism,

¹ *Vide*: "A note on Andrei Biely" by George Reavey (*The New Review*, No. 4, Jan. 1932). An essay in which Biely's work is examined and compared with that of James Joyce.

however, is penetrated with irony and satire which borders on the grotesque: he gives style to reality and mingles observation with fantasy. A typical romantic, Biely sees life as a mask, as a mere reflection of what really preoccupies and excites him—the dim and ideal image of Godhead which is revealed to him on the frontier of genius and grimacing grotesque.¹

Biely's work does not perhaps fully realize the new style for which he is striving and for the sake of which he has made such a break with the past. That is perhaps why his work is more important for its influence than for its intrinsic value. A whole generation of Russian writers is indebted to Biely, and the historian of literature will long find the traces of this complex and obscure artist.

It is curious to note that this symbolist, philologist, poet, and religious philosopher has always been a *populist*. He believed that literature ought to be reformed by the introduction of popular speech into prose and poetry.

Alexei Remizov (b. 1877) is a more obvious incarnation of this belief. He worked out an original style, free of all bookishness. He goes back to the sources of national speech, which, he argues, have been vitiated by foreign influences and "literature." Remizov's work, as distinct from Biely's mental acrobatics, is firmly rooted in folklore. From this latter he borrowed themes as well as artistic devices. Remizov, like Biely, imposes style upon reality and asserts that art is but a world of fiction and play, and that creation is not a representation, but a transformation and "theatralization" of reality. Hence Remizov's numerous devices by the help of which he produces his effects of mingled dream and reality, and of realistic life, which he describes with fine precision, with amazing sensibility for detail and with creative invention.

Remizov's teachers are, of course, Gogol and Dostoevsky. From the first he derives his banter and irony, which sometimes border on mockery, and his fondness for contortions and

¹ Biely's work is often compared with that of Joyce. Comparison, however, only helps to bring out the contrasts. There are undoubtedly elements in common: rhythmic prose, neologism, world-from-nebula creations, attempts at a relative prose. They differ most profoundly psychologically and culturally. Biely has no historical background and keeps leaping into the void. Joyce plays chaos with history. Joyce is more ubiquitous and polystylistic.

grimaces; from the latter, a morbid interest in all the dark and mysterious corners of the human soul, a sensibility for suffering and pain, and a humanism which is fond of masquerading under various guises of verbal and stylistic play.

Biely and Remizov brought to contemporary Russian literature a striving for style, literary play, the freedom of invention, the mingling of realism and fantasy, the bent for irony and grotesque, and, finally, the striving for a national dialectical literary language and spirit.

The Revolution did, in fact, make for a reformation of the Russian language, but in a different way from that envisaged by Biely and Remizov. Beginning with Mayakovsky's verse, written in the language of the street and public meeting, and ending with the novels of Leonov or the tales of A. Vesioly, which are profusely studded with peasant speech, Russian literature has, since 1917, borne a tremendous impact of purely colloquial and popular speech. This tendency has sometimes been exaggerated, and there are a number of Soviet works which remain ethnographically restricted, for their authors have availed themselves almost exclusively of the dialects of particular regions or of tribes settled in the outskirts of Russia. Some of the tales of peasant life are practically untranslatable, and present difficulties even for the Russian reader. This striving towards a national speech is also illustrated by the development of national literatures. There exists already a considerable and growing literature not only in the Ukrainian and White Russian languages, but also in the Tartar, Mordva, Caucasian, Armenian, Georgian, and many other languages.

7. THE SERAPION BROTHERS

The work of Zamyatin. The Satirical tendency.

These years of naturalism, rationalism, and tendentious literature saw the formation in Petrograd of a group of writers who called themselves "The Serapion Brothers,"¹ and who played

¹ This group was encouraged by Gorky. His rôle of godfather to the new intelligentsia in the difficult years cannot be overestimated. *Vide*: Soviet Literature (1917-1932), by George Reavey (*Twentieth Century*, November 1932).

a very important part in the history of Soviet literature. "In February 1921," one of its members relates, "in a time of sumptuary legislation and barrack-room regimentation, when but one iron and tedious statute was applied to all, we decided to gather together without statutes or chairmen, without elections or votes. We came together in days of revolutionary and great political tension. Whoever is not with us is against us! So we were told on all sides. On whose side are you, Serapion Brothers? With the Communists or against the Communists? For the Revolution or against the Revolution?"

"On whose side are we, Serapion Brothers?"

We are on the side of the hermit Serapion."

All the members of this group, independently of their political convictions, took the covenant of A. T. Hoffman's hero, the hermit Serapion. This covenant proclaimed the liberty of inspiration and the independence of art.

Evgenyi Zamyatin (b. 1884), who had already come into prominence before the Revolution as a penetrating representative of the Neo-Realistic tendency, now became the inspirer and teacher of the Serapions. Zamyatin, in his tales of Russian provincial life (*District Tales*), and in his stories of English and Revolutionary life (*The Islanders*), had shown himself a meticulous stylist who mingled an "imagism" of his own with faultless composition and executive precision. Compactness, expressiveness, and concentrated action make Zamyatin's work dynamic and intensive. His work is generally penetrated with irony and independence; for Zamyatin is an individualist, and some of his works have been prohibited by the Soviet censorship. This is the case of his novel, *We*, which is a satirical picture of a scientific society of the future, in which all passion and free thought have been replaced by a rationalistic and soulless, collective and mechanical civilization. Critics have already pointed out the curious resemblance which Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* bears to this novel, written ten years before.

Zamyatin taught the "Serapions" their writer's craft. At a time when all the stress was being laid on ideology and content, Zamyatin placed "good workmanship" first. His appeal was soon heard, and the "Serapion" group produced a number of

outstanding writers, like Vsevolod Ivanov, Kaverin, Tikhonov, Lunts, Slonimsky, Fedin, Tinyanov, Zoshtchenko, among others. And these writers asserted their influence against the purely social and tendentious type of literature.

This protest took several forms. One was the appearance of a Satirical tendency in reply to recent official optimism. This satirical current resumed the "critical and bantering" tradition of Gogol and Tchekhov. The Fellow-Travellers now attacked Russian ignorance, coarseness, and social disorders. They perceived that the new State, which was to point the way to all humanity, contained millions of people who were still living like savages, that Soviet officials were as partial to bribes as their predecessors, that the bearers of the revolutionary fire were hemmed in by liars, scoundrels, and hypocrites, and that the cobweb of meanness was again entangling the average man. The talented humorist Zoshtchenko makes fun of the petit bourgeois and half-educated citizen, who, while accepting the entire Communist phraseology, have, in their soul, remained as greedy and appropriative. The comic effect of Zoshtchenko's pictures is chiefly based upon his heroes' speech, which, proceeding as it does from their confused understanding, forms a mixture of newspaper jargon, intellectual dictums and dialect.

Valentin Kataev, in his excellent novel, *The Embezzlers*, describes the adventures of the employees of a Moscow Trust who have absconded with a sum of money, and who in their peregrinations come across a crowd of parasites and absurd personages not only filling Soviet organizations but also governing the provinces. Later, Ilf and Petrov in their humorous novels, *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf*, describe the type of Soviet bootlegger and gangster living at the expense of other people's stupidity and the respect paid to Communist titles and seals. This satirical tendency was grounded on the Gogolian tradition and imitated the styles of Zamyatin and Remizov.

That this satirical literature should have got past the censorship is due, first of all, to the fact that, in the period 1924-28 the Communist powers proclaimed the necessity of self-criticism. Thus many of the writers justified their boldness by this slogan. Besides, some of the Proletarian writers themselves were not averse to using this literary weapon. Thus,

Mayakovsky's best works before his suicide were his two dramatic satires, *The Bug* and *The Bath-House*.

8. THE ROMANTIC-PSYCHOLOGICAL CURRENT

The problem of the individual in the work of Olesha and Pasternak. The stories of Babel. The novels of Fedin and Leonov. The historical novels of Tinyanov.

The social novel conceived in the spirit of Tolstoyan Realism was another manifestation of the reaction against Tendencious Naturalism. The broad canvases of Sholohov and Fadeyev and numerous other works in the manner of Psychological Realism were primarily "social novels," but they portrayed living people with all their inner contradictions and indicated a transition to the psychological approach. By 1925-28 the works of most of the talented Fellow-Travellers exhibited not only a psychological but also a romantic tendency—romantic either in theme, treatment, or style. Some critics have erroneously termed this romantic tendency—which is still strong and flourishing—Neo-Realism.

A writer like Vsevolod Ivanov, who began with naturalistic impressionism, now exhibits all the traits of psychological preoccupation; curiosity in man, in his doubts and sufferings. But this tendency found its highest expression in the works of some of the best Soviet writers like Leonov, Olesha, Babel, Pasternak, and, in some measure, Pilnyak, Fedin, Kaverin, and Tinyanov.

The fundamental theme common to these writers is the conflict between individual and collective man, a conflict which the Revolution has made "tragic." As one critic has pointed out, all Russian stories and novels are the records of a vast and unending dialectic between man and the epoch. The epoch commands man to become a socially useful member of the collective body, and demands of him a sacrifice of his individuality, of feelings, and personal happiness. It also exacts obedience and rationality, and condemns theism and meditation. But man continues to defend his right to crazy thought, impetuous love, disarming tenderness, unaccountable passions, and the spiritual freedom he has won.

Iury Olesha, a clever and finished writer, raises the question of the admissibility of roses and dreams in an epoch of austere rationalism, and of the legality of the pretensions of individual imagination in an age of sober business. In his remarkable novel, *Envy* (1926), one of the most original works of late years, Olesha makes one of his heroes pronounce a whole speech in defence of feeling, of romanticism and poetic invention, all of which are accounted bourgeois prejudices in Russia to-day. The actress Gontcharova, the heroine of one of Olesha's plays, who keeps a diary in which she notes down the crimes and benefits of the Soviet régime, reproaches the Bolsheviks for sacrificing a wealth of spiritual experience and emotion on the altar of social utility. Olesha himself provides no solution. At times he despairs of "the conspiracy of feelings" which the personality is plotting against an adamant age and believes in the triumph of some new and as yet inscrutable truth.

Boris Pasternak,¹ the most considerable living Soviet poet, gives another answer. A purely lyric poet, Pasternak had already in his earliest verse, the difficult and complex form of which opened a new chapter in Russian poetry, consciously preserved himself from all social and political tendency. The poet, according to him, cannot answer any contemporary demands. When Pasternak was reproached because his verses were supposed not to correspond with the dynamic of the epoch, he replied: "In a time of rapid tempo it is best to think slowly." This does not imply, however, that Pasternak is alien to the Revolution: on the contrary, he comprehends it and is a revolutionary in poetry. He has also written several poems on revolutionary themes collected under the title of "1905." He is an essentially lyric poet, and the lyric of his creation is a highly dynamic instrument, blending the utmost sensibility with intelligence and intensifying the lyric force by a purely poetic play which on analysis reveals an ingenious synthesis. Meditation, philosophy, and a penetration of mysterious analogies underlie this poet's spontaneous, elusive and enraptured poems. His highly musical and often obscure verse may, at first sight, mystify the reader, but in time it discloses an under-

¹ *Vide*: "A First Essay Towards Pasternak" by George Reavey (Experiment No. 6, 1930). A first attempt to situate Pasternak's poetry in the post-war European scene.

current of apposite and quivering thoughts which grow as symbols upon the mind. Our epoch might be characterized justly in a few lines of Pasternak. His originality lies in both his personal independence and his style. His dynamic verb obeys the rigours of a fugue, while his revolutionary entity achieves a classical perfection. His verse may be regarded as a synthesis of the classical tradition, of the Symbolist musicality and of the colloquial interjections of Futurism. Since the death of Blok (1921), of Essenin (1925), and of Mayakovsky (1930), Pasternak remains the greatest living Soviet poet.

Pasternak and Olesha are perhaps the only two Soviet writers who record their own strivings and doubts rather than describe the manifestations of the outer, actual world. Their art is profoundly subjective, and this permits Communist critics to assert that their art, and especially Pasternak's verse, is the swan song of bourgeois individualism.

This judgment, however, does not explain the fact that the same romantic note of individualism makes itself heard even in the works of writers who attempt to give an objective picture of reality.

Isaac Babel, one of the most brilliant of Soviet prose writers, affords a striking example of this romanticism. At first sight, his stories might be a series of naturalistic sketches of the civil war. His best collection of short stories, *Red Cavalry* (1927), describes various episodes of Boudyony's cavalry campaign in the war against Poland. These stories, which remind us of the seventeenth-century scenes of Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, tell of blood and filth, of the senseless shooting of prisoners, of the murder of a father by his sons, of a Cossack who kills an old Jew "carefully," so as not to spatter himself with blood, of monstrous depravity, and of all the cruelty of people for whom murder is both a profession and a habit. Babel notes all the most terrible details of the civil war: how the Cossack "carefully" kills the Jew, how a sickening odour rises from a corpse-strewn battlefield. But a Bolshevik commissar, while breathing-in this decomposition, dreams of the Roman Capitol and of the fragrant thickets of the Campagna. And the syphilitic Sashka sings songs of the evening star and of his mother's hand in a filthy, lice-eaten hovel. Dream enters this world of disintegration, lyricism underlines the tragedy of death, and the nostalgia for

purity and spirituality makes itself all the more evident in the midst of incredible nightmares. Babel's chief device is chiaroscuro, the purely romantic stressing of contrasts, the revelation of the beast in man and of its immediate opposite of heroism, sacrifice, and striving. His short stories are written in lyrical prose; they are well constructed, their language is compact and expressive, and their characters are built up on a fine calculation of speech and psychological portraiture. This romanticism and style hold true of his later autobiographical stories.

Another distinct group of writers attempts to paint abstract, objective, and almost epic canvases of actuality. At first sight they might be thought to belong to the category of writers like Fadeyev, Gladkov, and Sholohov, those outstanding Proletarian novelists. But it is easy to see that the literary manner of Fedin, Leonov, or Kaverin is very different from that of the school of Tolstoyan psychological realism.

Konstantin Fedin may seem the most traditional of these writers: his novels, *Cities and Years* and *The Brothers* are written in the realistic manner. But he has several strongly marked romantic traits: the whole interest of his novels lies in the tragical conflicts of his heroes, in their romantic adventures, and finally, in the spiritual doubts fostered in them by the Revolution. Typical of this is his novel, *The Brothers*, the theme of which is, fundamentally, the fate of the intelligentsia during the Revolution. Fedin's style, with its bursts of lyricism and complex composition, in which the first chapter often appears as the *dénouement* of the whole novel, compels us to consider him as a writer who has little in common with either traditional Realism or the Tolstoyan psychological approach. Fedin also propounds the question of the fate of the individual caught in the storm of Revolution. And if, in his first novel, he condemns his hero's weakness and uprootedness, in the second he contemplates the conflict between the thirst for artistic creation, personified by Karev, and the demands of the time.

Dostoevskian motifs occur but rarely in Fedin. They appear, however, in their full force in the work of Leonov, who is undoubtedly one of the most important of contemporary Russian prose writers.

Leonid Leonov (b. 1899) began writing in the Remizov-

Zamyatin ironical manner, but his tale, *The End of a Petty Man*, which described the spiritual tragedy of an intellectual who was crushed by the cruel nature of the Revolution, exhibited the manifest influence of Dostoevsky. This latter became still more apparent in Leonov's more important works, in which he attempts to blend psychological analysis with description of social events and their implied philosophical problems. In *Badgers* (1925), Leonov described the years preceding the Revolution and the period of peasant revolts against the Soviets. In the *Thief* (1928), the social aspect makes way for the portrayal of the inner conflicts and sufferings of the former Communist, Vekshin, who had become a criminal, and who was living a strange and nightmarish life together with the denizens of the Moscow underworld. Vekshin's moral regeneration becomes the fundamental theme of the novel. In Leonov's subsequent works, *Sotj* (1930)¹ and *Skutarevsky* (1933), renewed attention is paid to public events and Five-Year Plan activity, but the real point of these novels lies in the spiritual dramas of their heroes and in the philosophical problems which they raise. Leonov's novels are written in an elevated style, with an abundance of romantic comparisons, with lyrical interludes, with a profusion of secondary characters, and with a variety of composition patterns. Leonov's heroes are almost always out of the ordinary; they are either turbulently passionate, scaldingly repentant, or impetuously self-sacrificing and amorous. And even when Leonov responds to the "social command" of his time, he cannot subdue his romanticism, his elevated speech, his humanism, and, as he himself calls it, the "curiosity in man's secret springs." Leonov, with his "emotional tensivity," with his heightened sensibility to suffering, with his conviction that "there is no happiness without torment," and with his moral anxiety, obviously contradicts the rationalistic tendencies of the epoch. He constantly raises the problem of the individual and of man's right to an independent and varied emotional and spiritual experience; he would even favour a certain simplification of life and renouncement of machine-run civilization.

It is precisely this motif which stands out in the work of another considerable prose writer, Boris Pilnyak (b. 1894), whose

¹ Published in England under the title of *Sot* and in America of *Soviet River*.

tales and novels are written under the strong influence of Biely. Pilnyak, in his work, confronts two Russias: the strong and organized Russia of the towns, symbolized by the determined and ruthless bolsheviks, "leather men in leather coats," and the ignorant peasant Russia, which is as old as the earth. This latter Russia is still living as it did in the seventeenth century, and its Revolution is primitive and elemental. The beauty of the Revolution for Pilnyak lies, not in its Marxism and Socialist efforts, but in the merciless and anarchical revolt which is the expression of the immemorial national nature. He repudiates all that seems mere cultural superstructure, mental calculation, or whim, and recognizes only primary and constant human experiences such as birth, love, and death. Pilnyak is also engrossed in philosophical and psychological problems, and the motifs of solitude, love, torment, and fear of annihilation take pre-eminence even in a work like *The Volga Flows into the Caspian* (1930), which was intended to be a constructive Five-Year Plan novel.

A disciple of Rozanov and Biely, of Nietzsche and Remizov, Pilnyak holds an original place in Russian prose. His earlier prose is obscure and manifestly Symbolist in character. The composition of his later works is simpler, and freer of mixed archaisms and newspaper jargon. His style remains a typical example of the Romantic-Psychological tendency in Soviet prose.

The renewed attention paid to man's inner world helped in an extraordinary degree the development of the historical novel based on psychological interpretation. The psychological study of historical personages and a certain stylistic reconstruction of the past—these are the problems which the historical novelists had set themselves. Iury Tinyanov, an erudite but somewhat dry writer, has, in his novels on Griboedov, Kukelbeker, and Peter the Great, written some of the best works of this type—the best, with the exception, perhaps, of Alexei Tolstoy's *Peter the Great*.

It might be said that this Romantic-Psychological tendency, comprehending as it does the majority of the outstanding poets and prose writers, has almost become the fundamental tendency in Soviet prose. This tendency was made all the more important by the fact that many of its representatives were attempting

to reform both the language and forms of artistic creation. It also revealed certain general characteristics of the utmost significance for the development of literature in the U.S.S.R.

In the first place, many of these works revive the humanistic motifs which are typical of nineteenth-century Russian literature and which have since been repressed. But while the imagining of man's spiritual world is, in these works, accompanied by a heightened individual note, the works of even the most extreme individualists are penetrated with social pathos and the consciousness of their public responsibility.

The works of these writers, combining, as they do, symbolist and realist elements, are characterized by stylistic preoccupation, complex composition, a fondness for literary artifice, a predilection for poetic vocabulary, a leaning towards popular dialect, a stressing of national or ethnographical features, and a portraiture of new heroes, such as the peasant, the worker, or the "new man."

By 1928-29 these characteristics become manifest even in the works of writers who upheld the cause of tendentious naturalism or of social rationalism, but who had been unable to discover satisfactory artistic forms for their ideas. But at the moment when victory would seem to have been assured for the romantic-psychological and the psychological-realist tendencies, a series of political events took place, destined, if not finally to alter the course of Soviet literature, at least to revive the old dispute as to the problems and goal of Soviet literature and art which had been rife in the period of "Militant Communism."

9. THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN IN LITERATURE

Its aims and practical achievements. The failure of literary dictatorship. The Organizational Revolution of 1932. Novels and poems about the Five-Year Plan.

As soon as the Five-Year Plan was decided upon in 1928-29, the NEP compromise came to an end and the "Socialist advance" began. A sharp swing to the "left" made itself evident in all spheres of life, that of culture included. A new

era of Militant Communism had begun. Just as Messianic ecstasy had turned the young revolutionaries' heads in 1918-19, so enthusiasm for Socialist construction now took hold of the youth, the working masses, and intellectual circles. There is no doubt that the years 1929-32 saw the birth of a special "Five-Year Plan Mysticism." This mysticism implied a belief in the possibility of constructing Socialism in a single country by means of great and heroic efforts, which were to create a mighty industry, the basis of Socialist prosperity. All efforts were to be mobilized for the attainment of this end, and every grain of energy harnessed for this experiment.

This Five-Year Plan psychology instantly made for a corresponding literary theory. Various groups of Communist critics, hitherto occupying but secondary positions, now made a stand for the "inclusion of art in the Five-Year Plan." Supported by the Party organs, which approved of the slogan, "Literature should help the Five-Year Plan," these groups rapidly became masters of the literary situation and seized control of the editorial boards of reviews and journals. Their headquarters was the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) and their high-priest the critic Averbakh, who became the virtual literary dictator of the U.S.S.R.

The left-wing policy, championed by RAPP and Averbakh, may be summed up in a few tenets which were constantly reiterated in the Press.

"The Soviet Union," wrote Averbakh, "has entered an epoch of constructive Socialism according to a definite plan, and it is advancing at a furious rate. Literature is lagging behind the general development of Industry. It must now go forward at a faster rate and participate in the general movement." "The depiction of the Five-Year Plan and of the class war within its framework is the one and only problem of Soviet literature," wrote the RAPP journal of 1930. "Literary works ought to reflect the fundamental themes of contemporary reality, which are industrialization, the collectivization of the villages, the war against the kulak and the middle peasant, the efforts of the Red Army chiefs, etc." Art must show itself active, excite the reader's enthusiasm, and encourage him to fight in the name of the official slogans. The writer, therefore, could not remain either indifferent or neutral, but must fight on the "literary

front." The value of his work would depend on the extent to which it helped the fulfilment of the Five-Year Plan. The fundamental aim of "Five-Year Plan literature" was the creation of a "Literary Magnitogorsk"—a work which was to have summed up current events and to have been as electrifying in its discharge of faith and conviction as the giant Ural Power Station of electric energy.

An extensive campaign was set on foot to execute this programme on the literary front. Averbakh and his lieutenants began to exercise an almost unlimited censorship. Writers who had not declared their absolute loyalty to Communism became the object of envenomed attack, and they found reviews and publishing houses shut against them. Writers who did not accede to the demand for "contemporary themes" were immediately labelled "counter-revolutionary." One publishing house refused to print a novel because the time of action was three years behindhand. Writers were also encouraged to fulfil useful functions, to pay visits to factories and collective farms or to the sites of new constructions such as Dnieprostroy or Magnitogorsk, and there collect material for stories or poems. Special "Writers' Brigades" were mobilized and set tasks such as those of describing the situation in the Urals or the internal conflict in the villages of central Russia. Special associations, like LOKAF (Literary Union of the Red Army and Fleet) were formed with the object of bringing writers into contact with the Army in the hope of furthering the development of a military literature. One of the outstanding features of the early years of the first Five-Year Plan was the summons into literature of ten thousand *udarniki* (shock-brigade workers and peasants) who had shown some literary inclination, in order to replenish the ranks of Soviet literature and to endow it with a really Proletarian spirit.

The system of "challenges" was encouraged in imitation of industrial rivalry. Thus, a poet might find himself challenged in a newspaper to write a poem about the oil-fields, while a prose writer might be given a month in which to write a description of a Volga collective farm. Groups of writers also took public oaths to fulfil within a specified time ("the literary Plan") some shock-task; that, for example, of describing the increasing production of coal in the Don Basin.

Briefly, an attempt was made at a rationally planned literature. The writer thus became a professional worker with more or less precise functions to perform, and these latter were determined by conceptions of a politico-economic nature.

The results of this policy, which was applied with fanatical ruthlessness for three years, proved highly unsatisfactory. It made in the first place for bureaucracy, and permitted officials to apply a "hundred-per-cent.-Communist" rule to literature. Literary values took a back place. Large editions of tendentious and sometimes illiterate novels were published. At their best these works were a return to the Naturalism of the early years of the Revolution, and at their worst merely "orthodox," the standardization of "orthodox" themes. The literary *udarniki* proved a failure and brought nothing positive to literature, and the attack on the non-party Communist writers led to the formation of a united front of "left" and "right" groups of writers, whose representatives began to raise stormy protests at various assemblies and meetings.

It became perfectly obvious that the attempt at a literary Five-Year Plan was threatening to disintegrate Soviet literature, or at least to arrest its development. The discontent of writers (and of readers, perhaps) assumed such serious proportions that the Soviet government was forced to grant another Charter of Liberties. The revolution that followed must be attributed in great measure to the interference of Gorky and to the decision of Stalin, who had become irritated at the poor results of the Communist drive in art and literature.

The Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party published an edict in April 1932, an edict which proved as important as the famous Resolution of 1925. But whereas the Central Committee Resolution of 1925 had legalized a situation which had arisen out of the literary disputes of the time and had given the Fellow-Travellers their full "citizen rights," the April decree brought about an "organic" revolution. The RAPP was dissolved and the literary dictatorship brought to an end. The uncompromising policy of the extremists was definitely condemned and Soviet writers were invited to join a general "Association of Soviet Writers," within which the Communist writers would form their own faction. It was held that the majority of Soviet writers sympathized with the efforts

of Socialist construction, and that it was therefore pointless to demand of them outward proofs of their political loyalty. LOCAF as well as other artificial Five-Year Plan organizations were dissolved. Editorial boards, publishing committees and censorship boards changed their composition. Averbakh and the chiefs of the RAPP were banished to posts in the Urals and in Siberia. It was clear now that they had represented a negligible minority.

The tendency typified by Averbakh in criticism and by Bezimensky in poetry may be regarded as the heritage of the "uncompromising" Proletcult epoch. Both Averbakh and Bezimensky insist upon the creation of a Proletarian Art, based on absolute fulfilment of Marxist ideology, on the development of dialectic materialist methods, on the necessary portrayal of current actuality and on a rationalistic interpretation of heroes and events. It still remained problematic whether these ideas should be presented in a realistic, or, as Bezimensky's supporters held, in an elevated romantic and abstract tone, the tone of his social drama, *The Shot*, and of his current poems. Gladkov's *Power* (1933) affords, perhaps, the best prose example of this tendentious, naturalistic style of writing, tempered by romantic "Communist-hero" lyricism.

The Five-Year Plan continues to serve as the fundamental theme both for the writers of the Realistic-Psychological school and those of the Neo-Realist and Romantic schools. The majority of these writers content themselves with describing constructive work in progress and with indicating the ensuing conflicts. Such are Leonov's *Sotj*, Gladkov's *Power*, Sholohov's *Virgin Soil*, Shaginyan's scrupulous but plodding *Gidrocentral*, and finally Kataev's vivid and exciting *Speed Up, Time!*

10. THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOVIET LITERATURE

Whatever the schools and tendencies, whatever the future direction taken by Soviet literature, its fundamental characteristics are already sufficiently clear.

Soviet literature has, from the point of view of *form* and *style*, completed the pre-revolutionary process of the disintegration of the old Realism and Symbolism; in their place it has

revived the tradition of Psychological Realism and encouraged Romantic innovation, which latter comprehends a stylistic approach to reality and a deepened interest in man's inner life. Its language, too, has changed and become more direct, expressive, and nervous. Its renouncement of previous forms of composition has given Soviet literature an added freedom of expression and imagination. And besides, its very themes have changed. Another of its characteristics is its proximity to life and plenitude of social content. So close is its contact with concrete reality that its æsthetic value is often diminished as a result, but this makes it, on the other hand, living and full-blooded.

Soviet literature is essentially social in character apart from all question of "social command." It would be a mistake to say that the attention paid by Soviet writers to social and political problems was due primarily to outward coercion. Russia is living its social drama, and its writers cannot but be conscious of the fact. It is perfectly obvious that the majority of Soviet writers do believe that bourgeois-capitalist civilization is disintegrating and about to perish, and are convinced that a new world is being built up in U.S.S.R. Hence the stress frequently laid on the conflict between Russia and the West, a conflict which is reflected in the pages of many of the Soviet novels.

Russian writers feel themselves more than ever to be the representatives of an entire continent, and their national characteristics manifest themselves now with particular force. Soviet literature, too, vibrates with a sense of Nature, primary emotions, and violent passions—elements common to peoples in times of revolutionary crisis and heightened perceptions.

It might be said that in so far as new men have entered Russian life, and in so far as the structure of Russian society and the motivating interests of groups and individuals have changed, this New Man has become the hero of Soviet literature. It would, however, be more just to say that Soviet literature is searching for its hero, and that it raises the problem of, rather than portrays, the new man.

We must also note the predilection which Soviet literature has shown to fundamental and difficult problems of existence. It would seem to be fulfilling Tolstoy's testament when the latter said that literature, to be indispensable, must be profound and significant, and to be attempting to demarcate certain funda-

mental and social themes. It might also be said that it is penetrated with unceasing spiritual alarm. Whether in positive affirmations, in satire, or in the stress it gives to contradictions, Soviet literature as a whole raises the question of man's fate in collective society. It is alarmed for the rights of the individual, not only in the transition period, but also upon the achievement of the future state. It is no accident that humanistic themes as well as those of individual freedom, of social command, or those again of the antagonism between rationalism and emotionism, recur so often in Soviet prose and verse. Thus, the Rationalistic school, on the one hand, puts forward the thesis of a logical, constructed art, conscious of its ideal hero, built up according to all the rules of dialectical materialism and reflecting the wisdom of contemporary science. The poet Gidash, a typical representative of this school, says that he reads Engels, Marx, and Kaganovitch's speech about Socialistic cities before writing love-verses. The Romantics and Realists, on the other hand, defend the harmonious development of the personality, its right to fantasy, sensibility, and to the happiness which, as Leonov says, "cannot be made to a pattern in a factory."

The conflict of these two antagonistic schools of thought is the real content of Soviet literature. The issue is fundamentally one between two different conceptions of culture and types of human society.

Some Communist critics argue that the work of Pasternak, Leonov, Olesha, and other representatives of what might be called the "individualistic" tendency, is but the survival of a past which is predetermined for extirpation upon the triumph of the Proletarian state. Others, on the contrary, believe that their work reflects certain undercurrents of national spiritual development, which will, sooner or later, manifest themselves in more concrete forms. These conflicting views invest the battle which is raging in Russian literature with an almost prophetic character and make its study a matter of universal interest.

MARC SLONIM.

FICTION

NOTE ON SOVIET FICTION

SOVIET Prose is not as old as the Soviet State. Its fifteenth anniversary has yet to be celebrated. Apart from Zamyatin's stories, Pilnyak's *A Bare Year*, Neverov's *Tashkent*, and a few other works, Soviet prose activity may be said to date from 1922-23. The Civil Wars had come to an end and the turmoil of the early years of Militant Communism had now given way to the constructive NEP policy, which assured the improvement of material conditions and allowed the writer a measure of ideological freedom.

The period 1917-25 was on the whole dominated by lyrical poetry and to a certain extent by "lyrical" or rhythmic prose of the type of Biely, Remizov, Pilnyak, Vesioly, Malyshkin, and partly Ivanov and Leonov. By 1926-27 prose had become a more dominant medium of expression, not only because poets like Blok, Gumilev, and Essenin had died, whilst Mayakovsky had lost much of his poetic fire, but also because of the quality of the prose works which appeared in those years. We need only cite such varied and important contributions as Kataev's *Embezzlers*, Babel's *Red Cavalry*, Fedin's *Brothers*, Olesha's *Envy*, Leonov's *Thief*, and Fadeyev's *Rout*.

After endless disputes and discussions, Soviet writers had by now begun to demarcate clearly the limits of their respective political and artistic camps. Prose until 1922 had been sporadic. The problem of the day was to re-establish some sort of literary continuity. It was Maxim Gorky's intervention which played such an important part in protecting old intellectuals, encouraging new writers, and founding various literary societies which should help to knit the most varied elements into an expressive national unity. It is to these years that belongs the foundation of the Serapion Brothers group which proved so important in the development of Soviet prose.

Soviet prose has a short but involved history. It may be approached in several ways: (a) Chronologically, *i.e.* subdivided into characteristic periods corresponding to (1) *Heroic*, 1917-22, the period, that is, of Militant Communism, Lyrical Enthusiasm, and Hardship; (2) *NEP*, 1922-29, a period of Settled Effort,

Discussion, Comparative Prosperity, and Satirical Outlook; (3) *Five-Year Plan*, 1929, a period of Revived Militancy (in the industrial sphere), Literary Dictatorship, Mysticism, and Conscription: (b) Historically, *i.e.* as a history of literary-philosophical movements regarded in the light of antecedent Russian History. This approach raises the problems of psychological continuity, of influences (that of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy), of the antithesis of experimental "modernism" (Biely and the Futurists) and realistic Proletarian narrative, etc.: (c) Ideologically, *i.e.* from the point of view of the Communist-Marxist critic who applies the teleological criterion of Proletarian literature. From this point of view NEP marked time while the Literary Five-Year Plan resumed the fundamental policy of proletarianization and has made for the added unity and strength of Proletarian literature.

The applicability of all these criteria make any outline of Soviet prose arbitrary. In presenting the Prose section to follow an attempt has been made as far as possible to bring out these different points of view. The sub-sections and texts have, where possible, been arranged *chronologically* and *historically*. Thus, first of all, come Biely and Remizov, two writers of an older generation, who by their experiments in prose style have considerably influenced Soviet prose, particularly in the period up to 1925, when Zamyatin and Pilnyak were influences. Secondly, the section, "The Writers of the Civil Wars and Everyday Life," brings together Fellow-Travellers of various stylistic persuasions who had set themselves a primarily descriptive and almost documentary task of recording their experience during the first years of Revolution, civil war, and NEP. Neo-Romantic writers like Pilnyak and Babel figure here in their recording capacity. Thirdly, come the Neo-Romantic Writers and the two Poet-Prose writers, Pasternak and Tikhonov. The Neo-Romantic writers, Fellow-Travellers all of them, who become markedly predominant as a group towards the end of the NEP period, and who include in their number brilliant writers like Leonov, Pilnyak, Babel, Olesha, Pasternak, and Kaverin, and are chiefly preoccupied with the "tribulations of the soul" and paint the anguish and alarm of the individual in face of Collective Man. Fourthly and lastly, come Proletarian and Five-Year Plan Writers. Proletarian literature had its

beginnings before the War, and Maxim Gorky may claim to be its father. It became after the Revolution both a means and an ideal—a means to the attainment of that greater Proletarian ideal which manifested itself in embryo, as it were, in the present. The first definite post-revolutionary Proletarian statements were Libedinsky's *Week*, and Gladkov's *Cement*. Sholohov and Fadeyev are the two outstanding Proletarian writers of to-day. As is pointed out in the Introduction, these writers on the whole favour a form of Tolstoyan psychological-realism. There is this to be said for putting Proletarian Literature last: firstly, its development has, on the whole, been slower; secondly, the Five-Year Plan, as an attempt to refute Trotsky's dictum that it was impossible to construct Socialism in a single country, constitutes an attempt to consolidate Proletarian Literature and to drive the Fellow-Travellers into the Proletarian camp; thirdly, the set-themes of Factory Construction and Collectivization, and the mobilization of writers to record this, has made "Proletarian themes" more current among all classes of writers. This explains the inclusion of writers like Kataev (*Speed Up, Time!*) and Kaverin (*The Return of the Kirghiz*), who treat of factory and farm respectively.

But curiously enough, while Fellow-Travellers like Leonov (in *Sotj*) and Kataev (in *Speed Up, Time!*) have plunged themselves actively into "constructive" work, the Proletarian writers Fadeyev and Libedinsky have been writing in "retrospective" or "domestic comedy" veins in their *The Last of the Udegs* and *The Birth of a Hero* respectively. As a result this latter was severely attacked by Communist critics. The Five-Year Plan dictatorial policy in literature carried out by the RAPP and its leading critic, Averbakh, succeeded so well up to a point that it was generally recognized that literary groups, and the Association of Proletarian Writers amongst them, had become an impediment to the development of Proletarian literature. The RAPP was abolished in April 1932, and a Union of Soviet Writers took its place. The first Session of this body proclaimed Concrete Realism to be the present goal of Soviet literature.

G.R.

SECTION A

TWO PRECURSORS AND STYLISTS

ANDREI BIELY

Andrei Biely, whose real name is Bugaev, was born in 1880, the son of a prominent professor of mathematics. He studied mathematics and philology in Russian and German Universities. His literary career dates from 1897. Biely became in 1903-1912 one of the chief leaders, theoreticians, and poets of Russian Symbolism. He stands at the head of the religious-philosophical current of Symbolism. To this period belong the verse of Gold and Azure, The Urn, Ashes, and the first attempts at a rhythmic prose, The Northern Symphony, The Cup of Snow-Storms, and a whole series of philosophical, cultural, and philological treatises. His first important novel, The Silver Dove, appeared in 1910.

From 1912-1916 Biely travelled and lived in Europe and Africa. He came under the influence of Rudolf Steiner's teaching, and his later work is coloured by anthroposophic cosmology. His second important novel, Petersburg, appeared in 1916. With his The First Meeting (1921) Biely practically abandoned verse form, though he remains a poet in his prose. His Kotik Letaev, begun in 1915 and published in 1922, is an attempt to build up a cosmology on a system of parallels: the pre-natal impressions of a nightmare and symbolic world are, with the birth and growth of the child, resolved into ordinary three-dimensional manifestations which yet secrete a memory of a fourth dimension. This theme permits Biely to develop his symphonic and verbal experiments which have earned him the appellation of the Russian Joyce. His later prose works include The Memoirs of a Crank (1923), At the Parting of Centuries (1930), and a several-volume panorama of Russian life, of which only the first two volumes have so far appeared, Moscow (1925-1926), and Masks (1930-1932), which will show the unmasking of the old social order by the Revolution and describes the revolutionary epochs of Militant Communism, NEP, and the Five-Year Plan reconstructive period.

KOTIK LETAEV

5512

PROLOGUE

HERE, on this sheerly-dividing line, I cast dumb and lingering glances into the past. . . .

I am thirty-two years of age; consciousness of self has rent my brain and rushed headlong into infancy; with my rent brain I watch the spirals of events rise up in smoke before me; and watch them running back. . . .

The past is threaded into the soul; on the threshold of my third year I confront myself; we converse with each other; we understand each other.

The path of the past stretches back with precision: from the defiles of the early infant years to the steep of this self-conscious instant; and from these steep to the defiles before the portals of death rolls down the Future; in them the glacier will surge again: in torrents of feelings.

Thoughts of that instant will charge as an avalanche in my pursuit; and that vortex of snow will blot out the overhanging sky that is so close to me overhead: I shall grow faint on the edge of the precipice; the path of descent is terrible. . . .

I am standing here, in the mountains: so I stood, among mountains, having fled from people; from the distant, from the near; and left myself, in the valley, with arms stretched . . . towards the far peaks, where:—

—rocky peaks threatened; jutted under the sky; called one to another; formed a vast polyphony of the cosmos in creation; and vertiginously, vertically, enormous masses massed themselves; mists climbed the crags of chasms; stricken clouds reeled; and rains poured; rapid lines of peaks ran in the distance; the fingers of the peaks moved, the azure, jagged ridges dripped in pale glaciers and faint nervous lines combed everywhere; the relief gesticulated and postured; torrents gushed and foamed from enormous thrones; and the reverberation of a thundering voice followed me everywhere: for hours on end my eyes danced with running walls, pine-trees, torrents and precipices, boulders, cemeteries, cottages, bridges; the purple of ragged heather

stained all the landscapes in blood; whirls of damp vapour spun from the clefts in the giant crags; and tumbled between water and sun; the dancing vapour sprayed; began whipping my face; a cloud fell at my feet, into riots of torrent; the turbulently churning foam hid under the milk; beneath it, everything quivered, sobbed, thundered, groaned and smashed its way through the thinning milk in the same watery riot. . . .

I am standing here, in the mountains: and the torrents are always the same—

—planted on the borders with old, wood-carved village houses and with a church steeple; the sonorous cowbells “clang” merrily and unceasingly in a sombre grey, wind-riddled, wind-swept world, where the pine-trees throw themselves headlong upon sheerest glaciers, to smash themselves against a wall; behold! the last small pine-tree has dashed forward; and hangs suspended; and hark! the hurrying winds resolve themselves, under the black roar of the crags, to blasts among the branches; hark! a guttural bassoon . . . amid the crags . . . gouges the gorge beneath the clear, sharp facets of the grey giants; thence, suddenly, sounds will rise of silvery lyres and zithers; there, jewel-like, shimmers the snow, and thence will glance that same (who you do not know); and with that same glance (which you do not know) will look, and strip the coverings of Nature; and reverberate in the soul: with the immemorially-familiar, most sacred, never forgettable. . . .

I am standing here, in the mountains: the descent awaits me; the path of descent is terrible. . . .

Thoughts of that instant will charge as an avalanche in my pursuit; and the vortex of snow will blot out the overhanging sky that is so near to me overhead: I shall grow faint on the edge of the precipice.

Thirty-five years to come and my body will have broken away from me. . . .

The ascent is like a benediction: it secretes the count of wanderings; and memory marshals them, not as having been, but standing: here and now.

Here and here you have been: here and here.

How did you miss your footing?

Remembering, I talk with myself: here, on this sheerly-dividing line:—

—"Below, at your feet, lies all that once painfully struggled to grow out of you and that was you;

—"that which dropped off as a dead stone and hardened in crags. . . ."

—"Nature, that girds you, is you; I see you, infant, among her gloomy defiles. . . ."

—"You are as I: thou art; we have looked each other in the face, and have recognized each other: everything that was, is, and will be; everything lies between us: and consciousness of self springs from our embraces. . . ."

Consciousness of self, like a babe within me, has opened wide its eyes, and has broken everything to the very first flame of consciousness; broken is the ice of words, conceptions, and meanings; the multiplicity of debatable truths has germinated and is clasped in rhythms; the architectonic of rhythms has defined itself and shaken off its former meanings as so many dead leaves; meaning is life: my life; it's in the rhythm of the times: in the gesticulation, in the mimicry of irrevocable events; the word is mime, dance, smile.

Conceptions are like drops of spray: they are to be found in the ceaseless ebullience, in the refractions of meanings, that erects the rainbow of the world that springs from them; rainbow is explanation; a dance of meanings: a dance of words; in a meaning, in a word, in a drop, there is no rainbow. . . .

Consciousness of self, like a babe within me, has opened wide its eyes.

There I see: what has been experienced, experienced by me; by me alone; consciousness of infancy, were it to merge, or overcome these thirty-two years, in the point of that instant infancy would recognize itself: it has become fused with consciousness of self; everything falls between them; the meanings of words whirl in autumnal showers of leaves: they have fallen away from the tree: and the inarticulateness of the words around me rustles and flutters; I have renounced their meanings; before me lies the first consciousness of infancy; and we embrace:

"Welcome to you, O strange!"

1915 *October*

Goshen—Amsteg—Glion—St. Moritz.

Chapter I

THE LABYRINTH OF DELIRIUMS

*The hour of inexpressible sorrow . . .
Everything within me . . .
And I in all.*

F. TIUTCHEV.

“THOU ART”

THE first “thou art” seizes hold of me with monstrous deliriums; and

with deliriums that seem ancient and long familiar: the inexpressible, the unprecedented states of a consciousness in wait within the body, the mathematically exact sensation that you are you, and not you, but . . . a sort of blister raised in nowhere and nothing, and which is in any case unavoidable, and—

“What is this?” . . .

In these words I would condense the unutterable blossoming of my infant life:—

—the pain of waiting in the organism; the sensations were terrible; and intangible; nevertheless ancient, long familiar:—

—there was no division into “I” and “not-I” and neither space nor time. . . .

And in their place was:—

—a state of intensified sensations; as if all—all—all were expanding: expanding and stifling; and within one’s self horn-winged clouds were beginning to sweep to and fro.

Later a comparison suggested itself: that of a self-surviving globe; the self-repeating, self-transforming and self-surviving globe sensed only “inside”; insurmountable distances were to be sensed: from the periphery and to . . . the centre.

And the consciousness was: of being conscious of the incommensurable, of embracing the incommensurable; terrible were the sensations of the insurmountable depths of expanses; and consciousness would run out of the circle of the globular shape to grope, within one’s self . . . further; and awareness crept in with a sensation of dreams: and within one’s self . . . deeper

within one's self, a confused awareness began to assert itself: consciousness was finding a new orientation; in horn-winged clouds it swept from the periphery to the centre; and writhed in torments.

"Impossible thus."

"Is there no end?"

"I'm overstraining . . ."

"Help me. . . ."

The centre would flare up:—

—"I'm alone in immensity."

—"There's nothing inside: all is beyond. . . ."

—and go out again. Consciousness, expanding, ran back.

"Impossible thus, impossible: Help me. . . ."

"I'm expanding. . . ."—

—So the infant would say, if it could speak, if it could understand; but it could not speak; nor could it understand; and the infant cried: why, they could not understand, and they understood not.

THE IMAGING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In that far off time there was no "I" . . .

—There was a puny body; and consciousness, embracing it, lived through its states in unattainable immensity; nevertheless, permeated with consciousness, the body bulged with growth, like a Greek sponge that had been soaked in water; consciousness lay outside of the body; and in place of the body could be felt an enormous gap: of consciousness as we understand it, wherein there was as yet no thought, but only the beginnings. . . .—

—(Were these sensations to persist in days to come, and were their fullness to dawn in this dark spot and illumine my body; and were I to turn my gaze into myself and illumine myself; then should I see; our sky: the clouds a-hurrying there in my holy-spiritual sky, borne upon thunders in a white-foaming flood; and the floods are in a flutter of winds, in a flutter of branches; and in a flutter of leaves; and everything is tossing and scattering thoughts; and this everything is reflected in the sky above us; that is why it speaks; and why it is visible. . . .)

—where there was as yet no thought, but only the beginnings: the first surges of delirium.

Incrustations formed themselves: the warmth about me fermented; and I was in torments of red heat; my consciousness-drenched body seethed (as bones froth in acids in bubbling foam); and discharged the scum of the first image: and my life became a ferment of images; and incrustations upon incrustations formed themselves before me:—

—objects and thoughts. . . .

The world and thought are but the scum of terrible cosmic images; blood pulses with their flight and their fires illumine thoughts; these images are myths.

Myths are former existence: once upon a time myths rose up before me in continents and seas; an infant wandered among them; and wondered delirious, like all: in the beginning all wandered among them; and when they sank underfoot, people began to wonder deliriously about them . . . in the beginning; but, first of all, people lived them.

Nowadays ancient myths have sunk in seas under our feet; and firmaments roar and rave to us in oceans of deliriums: the firmaments of lands and consciousness; a sense of vision was developing in them; and the distinction of the "I" and "not-I"; and the sense of differentiation. . . . But the seas stormed forward: the cosmos, fateful inheritance, used to burst into reality; and people used to huddle themselves in its least rags; everything melted in rooflessness: everything—everything was expanding; earths were swallowed up in seas; consciousness was rent in myths of the terrible fostermother; and floods were seething in ferment.

The thought-ark was in process of construction; over it swam the awareness of the world that had sunk underfoot, swam towards . . . the new world.

Fateful floods surge within us (the threshold of consciousness is shaky): take heed, they will burst upon you.

WE CAME OUT OF THE SEAS

WITHIN us are worlds of seas: of "Mothers"; and they storm and rave in fiery swarms of deliriums. . . .

My infant's body is a delirium of "mothers"; beyond it only the eye; a mere bubble over a flying precipice; to form and . . . vanish; I am in the world only with my head; my feet are still in the womb; the womb has fettered my feet; and I feel myself snakefooted; and my thoughts are snakefooted myths: I am living through Titanic states.

All thoughts are abysmal: an ocean surges in each; and, in a cosmic storm, floods the body; the ascending infant thought recalls a comet; behold, it drops into the body; and its tail glows a blood-red; and it shimmers in showers of blood-red carbuncles: into an ocean of sensations; and somebody has heaved the infant, heaved it between the body and the thought, between the precipice of water and fire; and the infant is terrified.

· · · · ·
"Help me . . ."

"I'm helpless. . . ."

"Save me. . . ."

· · · · ·
"That's growth, lady."

· · · · ·
"Help me. . . ."

"I'm helpless. . . ."

"Save me. . . ."

· · · · ·
The infant cannot shout like that (he will shout like that later); snakes creep within him, around him; they fill his cradle; and hiss in his ears.

That hissing was heard by you in that tranquil noonday hour, when all things turn to stillness, while the sun fires off its beams. . . .

You have already heard that shrilling: the shrilling of pine-trees.

And I go on swathing the early events of life in words:--
for me sensation was like a snake: in it desire, feeling and thought all merge into one enormous, snakefooted body: a Titan's; the Titan is throttling me; and my consciousness is fighting to escape: has broken away and is gone . . .

—except for not a very defined kind of point, hurled—

—into nullions of Aeons!—

to overcome the incommensurable. . . .

And it fails to overcome it.

Such is the first event of being; remembrance grasps it with precision; and pictures it exactly; if it is such (and it is such),—

—life previous to the body stands revealed in one of its facets . . . in the fact of memory.

BURNS, AS ON FIRE

MY first conscious instant is a point; it penetrates meaninglessness; and, expanding, becomes a globe, but the globe bursts, like a bubble: meaninglessness, penetrating it, explodes it. . . .

Swarms of soap-bubbles emerge from a slender straw. . . . A bubble will emerge, quiver, shimmer and burst; a drop of oozy liquid, inflated by air, will shimmer in all the hues of the world. . . . A nothing, a something, and again a nothing; once again a something; everything within me, and I in all. . . . Such are my first instants. . . . Then—

—scarce-perceptible glimmers glowed; and the dark began to peel off (as a snake's skin peels off a snake); sensations detached themselves from the skin: they crept under my skin and out dropped dark fruitful earths—

—My skin to me was a vault: such our notion of space; my first conception of it was as of a corridor. . . .

Consequently, our corridor appears as a reminder of the time when it served me as a skin; moved about with me; turn back, and it contracted behind me in a hole; and opened, ahead, in an aperture; later, I came to know the passages, the corridors and the corners; know them too well even; for here am "I"; and here am "I" . . .

Rooms are parts of the body; I have cast them off; and they hang over me that I may disintegrate later and become: part of the black earth; I build up thousands of years within my body; and cast out from my body my strange buildings; . . .

—(and nowadays: in my head I am laying the foundations of the temple of thought, compacting it, like a skull; and I shall take off my skull; it shall serve me as the cupola of the temple; the time will come: I shall walk through an enormous temple; and I shall emerge from the temple with the same ease as we leave a room).

Sensations detached themselves from the skin, which became a kind of awning; under it I crawled as in a pipe; and in my wake crawled other things from the hole; such the emergence to life—

—There were no images at first, but there was room for them in the awning ahead; very soon came the vision: of a nursery; the hole behind was sealing up, transferring itself to the gaping oven (the gaping oven is a reminiscence of the long-vanished, the ancient: the wind in the pipe howls of timeless consciousness); between the holes (my past and future) pours a flood of racing images: they contracted, scattered, interchanged, scurried, and, drenching me with boiling liquids, sucked themselves into me (their remnants are wallpaper, and they race to my sight in the night as races a starry sky). . . . The longest of reptiles, Uncle Vassia, would crawl out behind my back: snakefooted and whiskered, he later cut himself in two; half of him used to drop in for an occasional dinner, and the other half I met later: on the cover of that most useful of books, *Extinct Monsters*; he is called “dinosaur”; it appears, they are extinct; but I met them in the first instant of consciousness.

Such is the image of my emergence to life: a corridor, a vault, and darkness, and pursuing reptiles behind me . . .

—this image is related to the image of the wanderings through the temple corridors under the guidance of the bull-headed man with a sceptre. . . .

My mother’s voice it was that engraved all this on my memory: “He burns, as on fire!”

I was told afterwards that I was, at that very time, constantly ailing with dysentery, scarlatina and measles

DOCTOR DORIONOV

I REMEMBER a small-sized room. I do not remember the objects in it; only the disorder everywhere; everything thrown in confusion, topsy-turvy, and scattered, it might have been my soul a-quiver, alarmed, apprehensive, because . . .

—grandmother there, shaken in spasms of fears, but concealing her fears and yet infecting me with those fears, sits on there interminably rolling cigarettes, capless and bald; her forehead gathering in wrinkles, as, raising her eyes over her spectacles,

she peeps at me from under her brows, seated in a brownish capote there, in the tobacco smoke, thrown in relief on the wall; and in the feeble glimmer of the candle, neither the capote nor the baldness seem well disposed. I am convinced, on the contrary, that there is evil intention somewhere: evil I am convinced; but why, I cannot explain; is it because I behold grandmother's unseemliness (an entirely bald head in place of a cap with lilac ribbons), or because a good half of the wall is entirely missing: three walls in place of four; the fourth has swung open in a darkly abysmal yawn of multitudinous rooms—only rooms, rooms, rooms!—

—but were you to step into them, you would not return, clasped in a mass of as yet undeterminate objects, but, to all appearance, armchairs in austere, grey covers, projecting in the dumb-deaf darkness; but the point of it lies not in the armchairs, but so to say in the projections of air-matter, and in the open possibility of feeling the cool current of the draught from room to room, of seeing the armchair skip into the mirror. . . . In a word, sinister rooms!

Moreover, realizing how unthinkable it is to stir there, somebody has yet, against all reason, started to fidget there, and fumbles awkwardly among the armchairs, sprawls about, saunters, stumbles and directs—his unsubstantial, scarce-audible steps upon the distant voids. . . .

If one preserve utter stillness, then the step would not want to come near, because it prefers the freedom of stamping about there alone, rather than of tormenting us with the terrible possibilities of fearing the approach of the step; and, what is more important: of feeling the inseparability by wall from the step; one can live in such a position; one can also move, perhaps; but without the least little tap or rap; tap; and it will begin rapping: tapping and stamping, rising in a crescendo of thunders.

I feel the impossibility of further existence without the least sound: I try to utter a sound; grandmother, in a flutter, like an autumn leaf, shakes her hand at me:

“You mustn't do that: no-no-no!”

I utter a loud squawk: and—woh!—what have I done!

Here's the fulfilment; it has been already fulfilled, because he that lived there, in the depths, called by the rapping, is hurrying forward already; is already asserting his strength; and

from far and far off he responds to my call; and—ti: te: ta: to: tu—he stamps it out to me: that same (who, I do not know). . . . This was repeated many multitudes of times: out of the dark swarmed the thunders of the harsh and confusedly-pounding step; could one but reach the cot and, wrapping oneself up, fall asleep, there would be nothing: everything would come to an end; falling asleep, I should hear the thunders subsiding into a low whistling and snoring of someone, soothingly sleeping. . . .

Later. . . .

—from the thundering dark there ran out to meet me—
—the most prosaic of stout men, a fair-headed, short-necked and sanguine man, who used to turn his belly upon me; glitter at me with his gold-rimmed glasses; and his golden goatee; and in time, he appeared in the flesh: none other than Dorionov, Artiom Dossifeyevitch, my doctor; I was told later that I was constantly ailing at that very time. Doctor Dorionov, I remember, wore a pair of enormous goloshes, soled with something hard; and, when he entered the hall, he kicked up a thunder; I invariably recognized him by that thunderous stamping, by his vast raccoon coat, hung up in the hall, and by the sharp ring at the door; at his entrance I developed an aching arthritis in my legs; he would prescribe cod-liver oil; and he slapped himself on the knees as he did so, bending double with good-natured laughter; it seems he bred canaries at home; and when he heard singing—

The blue-winged swallow whirls and twirls
under my window, my sagging window—

—his eyes filled with tears: he played chess with my father and made jokes at my grandmother's expense, he used to assert that we live not on a globe, but in a globe.

I think that the pursuit and the thunders must be the pulsations of the body; consciousness, entering the body, lives through it, pounding its rhythms like a thundering giant; thus I explain the events of that dream.

And I think. . . .

EPILOGUE

THE instant, the room, the street, the event, the village, and the time of year. Russia, history, the world,—these are the ladder of my progressions; and I mount its steps . . . towards the expectant, the future: people, events, my torments upon the cross; and on its topmost rung awaits my crucifixion; my silken robe, in the light of this instant, glows from here as a cloak of purple; it seems I bear upon my shoulders a wooden and crushing cross; a flock of ravens circles about me, and their wings brush me; their beaks hold nails of iron: and stricken, I shall hang upon them; and I seem to see: the wind rends my cloak of purple; I fall under the burden; and at my feet yawns a hole that grows over in time with inarticulate grasses.

Step upon step unfolds before me:

They await me.

They await me: my new instants; and—new rooms—rooms, rooms!—

—from which there is no return, and my eyes open wide; and with unseeing eyes I gaze into space: events agglomerate as a village and a time of year; the din of time awaits me, Russia awaits me, history awaits me; amazement and fear take possession of me, history stands out sharply in a peak; upon it will stand the cross; I shall set it there: it shall be as a last step towards the vast world; I must mount it; at my feet will rise the hubbub of life, the crowd, which I shall behold with an unseeing gaze, as my arms embrace the huge wooden cross-beams.

My word could not have had an earlier birth.

The steps will succeed one another: the instant, the room, the street, the events of the time of the year, Russia, history, the world.

All this lies ahead.

Behind lies reality, which I think no reality; nor dream either.

“What is all this?”

“And where did it happen?”

Were these sensations to persist in days to come, and were the fulness of my future days to dawn in this dark spot and illumine the unfolding of my infant life, then—

—in the place of consciousness had yawned a gap, of consciousness as we understand it, where—(and something was in torments of a red fire, and in those torments flared up the “I”—my “I” rising from the winged fires, as on wings)—

—flared up the Sun, the Eye, and, wresting itself from me, soared, leaving behind a bond of beams, between it and myself: my rooms of the Cosmos.

My rooms of the Cosmos remained long present to my sight: they lost their lustre with time. But they flared up again, later.

I passed through the thermic state: a Sun had flared up in its depths; and had gone, soaring, a flashing disk lighting me, like a moon, with ancient myths; they hardened into earth; and “I” live now upon it.

I know, there will come a time:—

—(I am not sure when)—

—I shall be at war within me, my body and soul rent with nails and sundered, and in this rupture of torments shall cast a lingering look; the spirals of events will rise up in ancient smoke before me; and the crust that hardened upon me will be cleft in twain, and the semi-circles of dreams will be brimmed again with the glowing disk; the disk will fly at me (as if the Sun were rushing upon the earth), scorching me.

The word will flare up, like a Sun,—

—this will be in another place: and not now.

Consciousness of self will have grown man then, my consciousness of self is still a babe: I shall be continually reborn; the ice of conceptions, words and meanings will be broken: and penetrated with multiple meaning.

These meanings are as nothing to me; old meanings: inarticulateness; rustling and fluttering round the dry wood of the cross; and I hang with my selves crucified within me.

I crucify myself.

A flock of black ravens has surrounded me, croaking; I shut my eyes; and on the closed eyelids shines the splendour of infancy.

That splendour is the splendour of my torments, tempered in the fires.

We die in Christ to be resurrected in the Spirit.

ALEXEI REMIZOV

Alexei Remizov (b. 1877) was a student at the Moscow University when he was banished for three years to the North. He has appeared in print since 1902. His early works, The Pond, Sisters of the Cross (1910), as well as the plays Demon Childhood, Tsar Maximilian, and The Tragedy of Judas are evidence of Symbolist influence. Folk-tales and legends occupy an important place in Remizov's work; he has published them under the following titles, St. Nicolas's Parables, Trava Murava, Three Sickles. There are also his collected stories, The Fifth Pestilence (1912), City Noises, Mara, and others; his novels, On a Field of Azure, Olia. One of his best books, Whirlwind Russia, was written about the Revolution. So was Fiery Russia (1921), which sees the Revolution as a scourge and purifier. In these books Remizov displays his deeply national consciousness. Remizov's literary reminiscences about Rozanov and his studies of Gogol and Turgenev (Turgenev's Dreams) have a particular interest. A master calligraphist, Remizov also illustrates his books. He has also devoted a number of books to Russian history. Since 1922 Remizov has been living abroad, principally in Paris.

FIERY RUSSIA

(In memory of Dostoevsky)

DOSTOEVSKY is Russia.

And there is no Russia without Dostoevsky.

And in the last terrible hour, if such a terrible hour be fated, in the last unexpected minute before the last summons and judgment, who, if not he, only he, shall speak alone and for all? For all those suffering and tormented souls, wallowing sinners and yet innocent lovers? For Russia the rebellious, the desperate and hopelessly unhappy (for can a rebel ever be happy?). For the murderer, for the whole Russian people?

"Judge us," he will say to the judge, "if you can, if you dare."

And from his sunken eyes, that have burned to ashes from pain, will, like a spark, flash fire.

What a tired and torn heart—no human heart has beaten so strangely and fast, so impetuously and ecstatically. And the vaster the silence of the Moon—the huge, round, brazen Moon,

looking straight in at the window—the more violently beat the heart, and it pained even.

Who is he, and whence did he come?

Traversing what quadrillions of spaces—the response and reflex of what terrible wizard spirit, of what fiery desert spirit-tempter, holding the keys of human happiness?

Whither bent?

Towards what Golgothas without term?

With a word to appal human souls, set fire to the earth and, if such a terrible hour be fated, to answer for all the pain, for all the sin of Man, for Russia the rebellious and hopelessly unhappy.

Under the rolling peal and clang of gogolian bells, through the pushkin azure of Russia the incomparable and inspired, of Russia the enchanted and carolling, of the Russia of Vii¹—huts black-as-black, and half the huts burned down, with only charred beams protruding. And on the highway, peasant women, a multitude of peasant women, a whole procession of them, and all of them with emaciated, wasted and somehow tanned faces. One especially, there, on the edge of the crowd, so gaunt, so tall, she might be forty, and yet might only be twenty, with that long emaciated face of hers, and in her arms a babe cries, and her breasts must be dried up, with not a drop of milk in them. And the babe cries and cries and holds out its hands, bare, and its tiny fists have turned blue from the cold.

“Why are they crying? What are they crying for?”

“The babe, the babe is crying.”

“And why is it crying?”

“The babe is cold, its little clothes are chilled through, and give no warmth.”

“And why should that be? Why?”

“The poor, the burnt out . . . go begging for their fire.”

“No, no, tell me: why do mothers rendered homeless by fire stand there, why are people poor, why is the babe poor, why is the steppe bare, why are they not embracing, not kissing, not singing glad songs, why have they turned so black from such black misery, why do they not nourish the babe?”

¹ Vii—the hero of one of Gogol's stories.

But let all be illumined—

The snow has taken fire in a broad silver field and sparkles in crystal stars—do you hear Gogol pealing?—the frost somehow has flushed warmly, and songs ring out—

No songs, no stars. Everything's covered up, blackened out, muffled. And wherever you look, just one gaunt inseparable bitter joy-spoliator, mother sorrow.

To come into the world on the light and spacious earth of Pushkin and Gogol, and at that very instant have somebody's merciless hand slash at your eyes—so that's what she's like, this light earth!

"No, if I had it within my power not to be born, I would not accept this existence."

Dostoevsky saw man's fate in the world—and more bitter it is than ultimate bitterness—and not only man's. Remember Azorka!—the children were dragging it on the end of a rope to be drowned. Remember also the wretched hack, with eyes that were scarred with whipping, and even the things that have been denied a soul here—Iliushka's little boots, old, worn and patched, standing in the corner there by the bed.

The entire world agonized before his eyes—instantly.

And he feels, welling up in his heart, a tenderness as yet inexperienced, and tears and tears gush to his eyes, and he wishes to do something for all, to stop the babe crying, and the crying, too, of the black withered mother, to banish all tears from that minute, and that—instantly, instantly, without a moment's delay, regardless of everything and altogether impetuously—

But what can man do for the happiness of man?

Suffering is life, and man's lot confusion and misfortune.

And for man the most unbearable, the most terrible, is freedom: it is terrible to confront one's heart-free decision.

And if there be another way out, it lies only in the renouncement of the will—for is not man, the rebel, weak and incapable of facing his own rebellion? By the renouncement of the will, by fettering authority, by whole-hearted devotion in the beginning, it is still possible to correct and ameliorate something in the world, to make humanity happy.

But would man desire such unrebelling happiness with a stifled "to dare" and an appointed "I wish?"

Or perhaps there is no solution for man?

But to live by rebellion is impossible.

How shall we live then, how love? With what hell in our breast and what hell in our head?

By throbbing inexhaustible memory, by the ecstasy of the heart, by exploit, by the torments of the cross before the cross of the wide world—by these man should live and love.

Dostoevsky is Russia.

Vibrant, moved into eternity, sung by my sorrowful Word, and fresh, ineffable as yet, rising up turbulently from the dust, unrestrainable.

And there is no Russia without Dostoevsky.

Russia the beggar, the hungry and cold, burns with a fiery word.

The fire impetuously gushed from the heart.

I shall ascend a mountain, turn my face to the East—fire,
turn to the West—fire,
look to the North—conflagration,
and to the South—conflagration,
fall to the Earth—it burns.

Where and what meeting, who will shape this blazing, unrestrainable fire—

we-shall-burn-to-ash!

There, on the ancient stones, on the dear graves of Europe, a fiery heart will meet lucid wisdom.

And over Russia, spacious and parched, over the fire-wasted steppe and the menacing forest will light lucid and faithful stars.

1921.

SECTION B

THE WRITERS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND CIVIL WAR

EVGENYI ZAMYATIN

Evgenyi Zamyatin (b. 1884) finished the Gymnasium and Polytechnic as a shipbuilding engineer. Took part in the revolutionary movement as a student and was banished from Petersburg. Was sent to England during the War, where he constructed Russian ice-breakers. After the Revolution he lectured on naval engineering at the Polytechnic. Has written many technical works. His literary activity dates from 1911, when his District Tales brought him to the notice of the critics. His next book, At the World's End, was censored. In 1921 Zamyatin was one of the inspirers of the Serapion Brothers and a leading Formalist writer. His work is essentially individualist and ironic. Accordingly, his "Collective Utopia" novel, We (1922), was censored in the U.S.S.R. and its appearance in translation abroad made its author the object of envenomed critical attacks. Zamyatin's other works include The Islanders, a satire on English life, The Fires of St. Dominic (1922), and a number of plays, some of which, like The Flea, have enjoyed popular success in Russia. Since 1932 Zamyatin has been living in France.

MAMAI

IN the evenings and at night there are no more houses left in Petersburg: only six-storeyed stone ships. The ships, solitary six-storeyed worlds, scud along the stone waves in the midst of other solitary, six-storeyed worlds; the ships gleam with the lights of numberless cabins into the tumultuous ocean of streets. And the cabins, of course, hold no ordinary lodgers, but passengers. As on board ship, they are all distantly-acquainted, they are all citizens of a six-storeyed republic besieged by the nocturnal Ocean.

The passengers of stone ship No. 40 scudded in the evenings through that part of the Petersburg Ocean which can be located on the map under the name of Lachtinska Street. Ossip, formerly porter and now Citizen Malafeyev, stood by the gang-

way, peering through his spectacles into the dark beyond; whence, at rare intervals, the waves cast up now one, now another, of the passengers. Citizen Malafeyev would pull them out of the gloom, all wet and covered with snow, and, adjusting his spectacles, he would apportion the respect due to each; the source of this respect seemed somehow to be connected by a complicated mechanism with the spectacles.

Now he turns round, like a severe schoolmaster, with spectacles on the end of his nose, for the benefit of Piotr Petrovitch Mamai.

"Your wife, Piotr Petrovitch, has been expecting you for dinner. Quite a while now. Why so late?"

And with that the spectacles settle down defensively in their saddle. The next passenger, a long-nosed fellow from No. 25, arrives in a car. How awkward! This long-nosed one is a problem: "sir" won't do, and "comrade" is a little awkward. How can one get round it. . . .

"Ah, mister-comrade Milnik! Nasty weather. . . . Mister-comrade Milnik. . . ."

And finally, the spectacles shoot up on to the forehead; Elisei Eliseivitch is stepping aboard.

"Well, thank God! Everything all right? Fur coat and all, aren't you afraid of losing it? Allow me—I'll brush it. . . ."

Elisei Eliseivitch, the *upravdom*, is also captain of the ship. Elisei Eliseivitch is one of those gloomy Atlases who, stooping and wrinkled with suffering, seem to be bearing the cornice of the Hermitage along Millionaya Street.

That day the cornice evidently weighed still heavier. Elisei Eliseivitch was puffing and blowing:

"Send word to all the flats . . . quick . . . Meeting . . . in the common room. . . ."

"Lord! Elisei Eliseivitch, is there some new . . . complication?"

But no answer was necessary: a glance at that tortured forehead, at those heavily burdened shoulders sufficed. And citizen Malafeyev, ingeniously balancing his spectacles, ran to rouse the passengers. His tocsin knock on the doors sounded like the Archangel's trumpet: embraces congealed, quarrels froze in rigid puffs of breath, the soup-spoons hung suspended on their way to the mouth.

Piotr Pietrovitch Mamai was eating soup. Or to be more exact, he was being rigorously fed by his wife. Buddha-like, she throned it on the armchair, mighty, merciful and multi-breasted. Buddha-like, she nourished the terrestrial man of her creation on soup.

"Now, do hurry up, Pictienka, the soup will get cold. How often must I repeat: I won't have you read at table. . . ."

"Yes, Alienka, yes, immediately, yes, immediately. . . . It's the sixth edition. Do you realize? The sixth edition of Bogdanovitch's *Dushenka*! In 1812, at the time of the French invasion, the whole edition was burnt, and only three copies . . . And this is the fourth. Do you realize?"

The Mamai of 1917, unlike his warlike namesake of the thirteenth century, only conquered books. As a sturdy ten-year-old lad he learnt the Ten Commandments, loved playing nibs, and was fed by his mother: as a bald-headed boy of some forty years of age, he worked in an insurance company, found pleasure exclusively in books, and was fed by his wife.

A spoonful of soup as a sacrifice to Buddha, and once more the terrestrial man in his preoccupation forgot the vision in the marriage ring and tenderly felt and caressed every letter.

"An exact rendering of the first edition. . . . With the approval of the Censorship Committee. What a nice darling h, on its two stout little legs. . . ."

"Well, Petia, what's the meaning of this? I've been shouting at you, and you're still reading. Deaf? You must be deaf, there's somebody knocking."

Piotr Pietrovitch made for the hall as fast as his legs would carry him. At the door he was met by a pair of spectacles on the end of a nose.

"Elisei Eliseivitch has called a meeting. Hurry up."

"What a nuisance. One just settles down to a book. . . . And what's the matter now?" There were tears in the bald-headed boy's voice.

"I've no idea. Only hurry up. . . ." The cabin door banged and the spectacles hurried away.

Clearly all was not well on board. The ship had, perhaps, lost its bearings, or again, an invisible leak might have sprung and the distressing Ocean of the streets, maybe, was already threatening to burst in. Somewhere above, to the right and to

the left, resounded alarming staccato knocks on the cabin doors; somewhere, on dim-lit landings, sounded the muffled undertones of conversations; and the patter of quickly-descending feet; of feet making for the common cabin, the house club-room.

And there the vaulted sky looked ruffled with stormy clouds of tobacco smoke. A stifling, calorific silence hung in the air, broken occasionally by scarcely-audible whispers. Elisei Eliseivitch rang a bell, stooped forward, frowned—his shoulders could be heard cracking in the darkness—raised the cornice of the invisible Hermitage and let it fall with a crash on the heads below.

"Gentlemen. According to reliable information, there will be a house-search to-night."

The scraping and shuffling of chairs, a few heads shot out of the mass, protruding fingers with rings, warts, ribbons, and side-whiskers. And, from the tobacco clouds, a downpour on the stooping Atlas:

"No, allow me! We'll be obliged. . . . How? And the paper money? . . . Elisei Eliseivitch, I suggest that the gates . . . Books, that's the surest place, books. . . ."

Stooping stiffly, Elisei Eliseivitch bore the downpour. And without even turning his head (perhaps it would not turn now), he addressed Ossip:

"Ossip, whose turn is it to go on guard to-night?"

Amid the silence, Ossip's finger traced a fatal scribble on the wall: the finger set in motion not letters, but Mamai's heavy book-shelves.

"It's Citizen Mamai's turn next, Citizen Malafeyev."

"All right. Take the revolvers. And in case anybody attempts to enter . . . without a warrant . . ."

Ship No. 40 scudded through the stormy seas of Lachtinska Street. It rolled and groaned as the snow thrashed its gleaming cabin-windows; there was an invisible leak somewhere in the hold, and there was no certainty that the ship would weather the stormy night and reach a morning harbour, or—that it would not go down. In the rapidly emptying common-room, passengers swarmed round the petrified captain.

"Elisei Eliseivitch, and if they search through our pockets as well? But surely they won't."

"Elisei Eliseivitch, and if I hang up my notes with the toilet-paper."

The passengers rushed to their various cabins, and their behaviour in the cabins was unusual; they crawled over the floor, their hands explored under the cupboards, they peeped with awe inside a plaster-cast head of Tolstoy; they unhooked some ancient frame, from which their grandmother had smiled tranquilly for the last fifty years.

The terrestrial man-dwarf Mamai stood face to face with Buddha and hid his eyes from the omniscient terrifying eye. His arms were perfectly useless strangers to him; short penguin wings. His hands had been his great embarrassment for the last forty years, and if they had not embarrassed him then, he might, perhaps, have spoken and unburdened himself—and yet it was so terrifying and unthinkable. . . .

"I can't think why you're so frightened! Even your nose has gone all white! What does it matter to us? What thousands have we got?"

God knows, if the Mamai of thirteen hundred and something had possessed hands as strange and awkward, the same secret and the same wife, he might, perhaps, have acted as the Mamai of nineteen-seventeen. Somewhere, from some corner, through the menacing silence, sounded the scratching of a mouse, and the Mamai of nineteen-seventeen flew full speed with his eyes in the direction of the mouse-hole, and stammered out:

"I have . . . that is . . . we have, four thousand two hundred."

"What? You? Where did you get it?"

"I . . . I . . . little by little. . . . I was afraid to ask you so often. . . ."

"What? You mean you stole it? You deceived me, you mean? And I, unfortunate creature, I thought . . . but Pietienka, dear, how. . . . Ah, what a wretched creature I am!"

"It was for books. . . . I . . ."

"I know these books in skirts! Don't talk to me!"

The ten-year-old Mamai had only once in his life been beaten by his mother; he had turned on the tap of the newly-kindled samovar, the water had all run out, the samovar had become unsoldered, and the tap drooped sadly to one side. And now, for the second time in his life, Mamai felt his head viced under his mother's arm, his trousers let down, and . . .

But suddenly, with a boyish sense of cunning, Mamai found a way of glossing over the sadly drooping tap—the four thousand and two hundred. He said plaintively:

“It’s time for me to go on guard till four. With a revolver. And Elisei Eliseivitch said that if anybody attempted to enter without a warrant. . . .”

Instantly the multi-breasted, benevolent mother replaced the lightning-menacing Buddha.

“Lord! Have they all gone mad? It’s all Elisei Eliseivitch’s fault. Take care! And don’t really take it into your head to . . .”

“N-no, I’ll just—er—keep it in my pocket. Do you think I ever could? I wouldn’t harm a fly. . . .”

He spoke the truth, for if ever a fly happened to fall into Mamai’s glass, he would always pick it up carefully, blow on it and let it go . . . fly away! No . . . there was nothing to be afraid of.

But the four thousand two hundred.

And once more the Buddha:

“What a plague you are! And now, where will you hide your loot,—no, not a word, please,—loot, yes. . . .”

Books? the goloshes in the hall? the lavatory paper? the samovar pipe? the lining of his hat? the rug with the pale blue knight hanging in the bedroom? the partially-opened and damp umbrella? a stamped envelope clearly addressed to an imaginary commissar, Comrade Goldebaev, carelessly left on the table? . . . No, too dangerous. . . . And, finally, towards midnight, it was decided to put all hope in the finest of psychological calculations: they will search wherever they please, except near the entrance door, and by the entrance door there was a loose parquet square. The square is artfully raised with a paper-knife. The stolen four thousand (“Not a word, please!”) are enveloped in waxed biscuit paper (“It may very likely be damp under the entrance door”), and the four thousand are interred under the square.

Ship No. 40 is all a-quiver, on tiptoe, a-whisper. The port-holes gleam feverishly into the dark ocean of streets, and on the fifth, second, and third floors curtains are raised and shadows appear in the bright panes. No, not a thing to be seen. However, there are two of them down in the yard, and they will sound the warning when it begins. . . .

Below, with his spectacles perched on the end of his nose, stood Citizen Malafeyev, meditating.

"I'm by nature a peaceful, kindly soul, but it's hard living in these evil times. Let's see, I thought to myself, I'll take a trip home to Ostaskhov. I arrive . . . and the international situation, . . . well, you can't imagine anything worse. Everybody at everybody else's throat—no better than wolves. No life for me, that. I'm a peaceful soul. . . ."

Thus spoke the peaceful man, holding in his hand a revolver—with its six deaths tightly-packed in the six bullets.

"But how did you manage in the Japanese war, Ossip? You had to kill."

"Well, in war. . . . War, of course, is another matter."

"And you used the bayonet, too?"

"On occasions. . . . It's like pricking a melon, a bit hard, at first, when it's the rind, and then—in it goes all right, very easy."

Mamai, at the mention of the melon, felt cold shivers go down his back.

"And I . . . I wouldn't do it for anything. Even if it meant my immediate death!"

"You wait! When you see it close, you'll think different. . . ."

Silence. White snow-flies fly round the lamp. Suddenly, in the distance, the long-drawn-out crack of a rifle-shot, and then again silence, and the snow-flies. Thank God, four o'clock! They will not come now. The guard will be changed in a moment, and then back to the cabin, to sleep. . . .

On the wall of the Mamaev bedroom, the pale-blue, chequered knight swung his pale-blue sword and paused; a human sacrifice was being offered before the eyes of the knight.

Lady Mamai, all-embracing, multi-breasted, Buddha-like, sat throned in the heights of the white linen clouds. Her appearance said she had finished the creation of the world that day and had realized that everything was very good; even this little man, in spite of his four thousand two hundred. The little man stood resignedly by the bed, frozen, red-nosed and with short, stranger-like, penguin-wing arms.

"Well, get in, get in. . . ."

The pale-blue knight half shut his eyes. It was distressingly obvious that the little man would cross himself, stretch out his arms and dive head-forward, as into water.

Ship No. 40 weathered the storm and put in at the morning harbour. The passengers were hastily pulling out their business portfolios, baskets with provisions, and were hurrying ashore past Ossip's spectacles. The ship was in port, but only till evening; and beyond lay the Ocean again.

Stooping, Elisei Eliseivitch bore the cornice of the invisible Hermitage past Ossip, and crashed it down on him as he went by:

"You may count on it for sure to-night. You had better warn them."

But a whole day had to be lived through before night. And the passengers wandered perplexedly about that strange, unfamiliar city—Petersburg. So like, in some ways—and yet so unlike—the Petersburg they had sailed from almost a year ago, and sailed where to? God only knows. And would they ever return? Strange, frozen waves of stone and snow; hills and valleys; Australian aborigines, clad in strange rags, with rifles slung over their shoulders on strings; and outlandish customs, too—paying their calls by night, in the manner of Walter Scott's Rob Roy. And here, now, lies the Zagorodnyi, with drops of blood branded in its snow. No, no Petersburg this!

Mamai wandered along this unfamiliar Zagorodnyi, among the Australian aborigines. His penguin winglets embarrassed him; his head drooped, like the tap of the unsoldered samovar; and, on his left, down-trodden heel, a hard snow *globus hystericus* made every step a torture.

But he suddenly lifted his head, his feet danced along like a twenty-five-year-old's, poppies bloomed in his cheeks, and from a shop-window there smiled on Mamai—

"Hey, look where you're going!" Swarthy aborigines pushed by him with enormous sacks of corn slung over their shoulders.

Mamai jumped out of the way, without taking his eyes off the window, and as soon as they had gone by he was back at the window again, where there smiled—

"Yes, for the sake of this—one might steal, or deceive or do anything."

From the window there smiled, temptingly and voluptuously uncovered, a book of the time of Catherine the Great: *A Portrait Descriptive of the Beauties of Saint-Petersburg*. With a seemingly

negligent gesture of feminine wile, it allowed a glimpse into its interior; there, into a warm hollow between two supple, marble-blue pages.

Mamai fell in love like a twenty-two-year-old. He used to go to the Zagorodnyi every day and, looking silently into the window, sing serenades. He could not sleep at night and he deluded himself: he pretended he did not sleep because a mouse was gnawing somewhere under the door. He went out every morning, and every morning the same square by the entrance door used to thrill him sweetly. Mamai's fortune lay buried under that square, at once so near and so distant. But what would he do, now that the truth about the four thousand had been revealed?

On the fourth day, gripping his heart, like a sparrow, in his fist, Mamai penetrated through the familiar door on the Zagorodnyi. Behind the counter stood the grey-bearded, bushy-browed southerner, in whose captivity she pined. His warrior namesake came to life in Mamai, and Mamai bore down bravely upon the southerner.

"Ah, Mr Mamai! I've set something aside for you . . . a long time now, a long time. . . ."

Gripping the sparrow tighter, Mamai pretended to page the books, caress them, but he was nothing but back; for there behind his back, in the window, she was smiling to him. Picking up a faded copy of an 1835 *Telescope*, Mamai bargained endlessly; and then hopelessly waved his hand. Finally, sniffing along the shelves, he made his way, with circuitous fox-steps, towards the window, and then, casually:

"And how much is this?"

Ah! the sparrow had flown. Hold it! Hold it! The southerner fingered his beard:

"We-ell . . . as a favour . . . a hundred and fifty, to you."

"Hm. . . . Perhaps. . . . (Cheers! Bells! And salvos!) Well, perhaps. . . I'll bring the money to-morrow and take it."

But the most terrifying—the square at the entrance door—still lay ahead. That evening Mamai sat on pins and needles: he must have it, he couldn't, he could, it was unthinkable, possible, impossible, necessary.

The omniscient, merciful and terrible vision-in-the-wedding-ring was drinking tea.

"Why aren't you eating, Pietienka? What's the matter with you. . . . You've been sleeping badly again?"

"Yes, the mice. . . . I don't know. . . ."

"Stop twisting your handkerchief like that! That's something new!"

"I'm not twisting it. . . ."

The glass was emptied at last; not a glass, but a bottomless, forty-bucket barrel. The Buddha, in the kitchen, was accepting sacrificial offerings from the cook. Mamai was left alone in the study.

Just before the beat of twelve, Mamai was ticking the minutes like a clock. He then swallowed a mouthful of air, listened, tiptoed to the writing-desk and picked up the paper knife. Then he squatted down feverishly, like a gnome, by the entrance door. An icy dew beaded his bald head: he inserted the dagger under the square, levered, and . . . gave a desperate howl.

At that howl, the Buddha thundered in from the kitchen and beheld at her feet a turnip of a bald head, a crouching gnome with a dagger, and, lower still, a small heap of nibbled paper.

"The four thousand . . . the mice. . . . There, there it is! There!"

Merciless and cruel as the Mamai of thirteen hundred and something, the Mamai of nineteen-seventeen sprang from his haunches and leapt, brandishing his dagger, towards the corner by the door where the mouse had run, escaping from under the square. And Mamai bloodthirstily stabbed his enemy. A melon—hard at first, because of the rind—then easy and—stop: the wooden square of the parquet, and the end.

1920.

BORIS PILNYAK

Boris Pilnyak, whose real name is Wogau, was born in 1894, a doctor's son. He finished his education at the Moscow Commercial Institute. He has travelled much in Russia and Europe. His literary activity dates from 1915, but his fame only from 1922, when he published his novel A Bare Year, the first literary attempt at an actual and historical panorama of the Russian Revolution. Until 1926, under the influence of Biely and Remizov, Pilnyak wrote in a more complex style. To this period may be attributed Mother Damp Earth, Machines and Wolves, Ivan and Marya. In 1927 he published stories of simpler composition, Disordered Time. As a result of a trip to China and Japan, Pilnyak wrote The Chinese Tale, Stories of the Orient, etc. His tale The Unextinguished Moon (1927), and Mahogany (which was later included in his novel The Volga Flows into the Caspian (1931)) provoked loud protests from the Soviet critics, who accused Pilnyak of bourgeois tendencies. After a long silence, Pilnyak has, in 1933, published a chronicle of his American impressions, O.K. Pilnyak's art continues to excite the most various reactions in U.S.S.R.

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—Extract from *A Bare Year* by Boris Pilnyak, published in an English version by quondam Payson and Clarke, of New York, under the title (unauthorized by me) of *The Naked Year*. This version restores the original text, which, from prudish motives, was maltreated by the American publishers. It is the only authorized text of my translation.—ALEC BROWN.]

A BARE YEAR

THIRD WING OF A TRIPTYCH

the most sombre of all

The whole world wrapped in chill twilight—that twilight of autumn, when the sky looms with snow and winter, at sunup will crumble to snow. The whole world soundless and black. The steppe. The black soil.

The deeper into these plains you go, the higher are the stacks, the squatter the cottages, the rarer the hamlets. And then—a pillaged desert waste.

Through the black crevice twixt sky and steppe blows the winter wind. The low weeds, laid bare now harvest is over and the last grasses and wheats and barley are reaped, makes a faint rustling. Soon the glassy moon comes up. If the clouds gather there will be snow, or icy sleet.

Cornlands.

At the crossing, oxen; pulled up, a long time. Their necks stretched down. They stand submissive, gazing submissively into the plains, born of the plains. The train crawls past them and away. There is no church in this hamlet, only a miserable mosque.

The steppe.

The train creeps slowly on—the leadcoloured horseboxes as full of people as the people are full of lice. The train is dead silent. People cling to the roofs and the footboards and the buffers. And at the tiny station, Mar Junction, where trains never stop and even staffs are not exchanged, the train howls with a human howl: people yelling from roof to roof, so to the engine; gruesome somehow in the chill twilight. And Gavril pulls up the train. The young man on duty, in forage cap with red band, from sheer misery of boredom meets the train at the platform. People from the train rush to pools for water. The train buzzes like a hive, buzzes, then strains, creaks like an old swung coach, and a peasant woman with eyes starting for pain is left on the sleepers. She runs after the train, crying in despair, 'Mitya pet, Mitya, look after my little ones!'

Then she waves her bundle and runs blindly off over the sleepers, howling and whining like a frightened bitch. In front of her lies the waste space of the plains. She turns aside and runs to the station house to the young clerk who from nothing better to do is still standing on the platform, thoroughly miserable. The woman cringes towards him and her lips quiver, and her eyes are full of pain.

'What do you want?' asks the young clerk.

She doesn't say a word, just shrieks at a spasm of pain and runs blindly off again howling and waving her little bundle. The watchman, an old Tartar, says sourly 'It's her bearing come on the woman. The woman's having a kid. Hallo, you, missus, come you here. . . . Russian woman, she like a cat' and the old man leads the woman into the station house into

his little room, where on a bunk lie a mouldy straw mattress and a sheepskin coat. The woman, he was quite right, flops down onto the bunk like a cat and whispers savagely

‘Go away, you rogue, go away . . . bring a woman.’

But there isn’t a single woman in the station.

The clerk strides up and down the length of the platform, and stares into the dark plains, and thinks, savagely—‘Asia.’

The plains are empty and soundless. Up into the sky goes the tiny, glassy moon. The wind rustles, harsh and chill. The clerk walks up and down the platform a long time, and then goes into his office. Through the wall come the howls of the woman. The clerk rings up the next station and says (like all Russian railway clerks) ‘Akhmitovaaa! Fiftyeight out-t-t! Anything this way-y-y?’

But there is nothing this way.

He sits down on the hard railway settee and turns over the pages of *The Clarion* that he has turned a thousand times, and then he lies down, merely not to go on sitting. The old man brings in a lamp. The clerk dozes sweetly.

When his duty is over he goes to his village home. Mar Junction (at which trains do not stop and even staffs are not exchanged) is immediately lost in the darkness. All around is waste, the empty plains. The clerk goes past the *Mar*: the barrow rises dead and silent from the plains—silent as to what wandering folk, and when, threw up the earth of it, and what is hid within. The feathergrass on the barrow rustles like an old tale. The black soil of the country has panned as hard as asphalt, and rings under foot.

The village is soundless: nothing but the dogs’ spasmodic barking. He goes through the Tartar hamlet and down into the ravine where the Finnish settlement is, and then climbs up the opposite slope. In the cottage the soldier’s wife puts kasha and pork dripping and milk on the table. The clerk wolfs his meal, dresses in his best, and goes off to pay a visit to the schoolmistress.

At the schoolmistress’s he puts a fresh chip in the bracket, and as its glow begins to dissolve the darkness he says

‘Asia. Not a country, just Asia. Tartars. Finns. Beggary. Not a country—just Asia.’

And thinks of his own beggardon.

The schoolmistress is standing by the stove, wrapped in a downy shawl; she is beginning to show her years. After a while she heats the samovar and makes some barley coffee. . . .

Late in the night the clerk goes home to sleep in his little room at the soldier's wife's. The bed creaks, a guitar tinkles and in the corner, behind the stove, snores a pig. The soldier's wife clears the table, and goes out. Through the thin mud wall he can hear her ease herself and drive away the dog eager to gobble up her droppings. He listens to all that and extraordinary thoughts come into his head: of money, beautiful, finely dressed women, fashionable frocks, wines, parties, all the best—all of which he is some day going to have. . . . The woman prays at great length, mumbling away. The light goes out, and she patters barefoot over the clay floor, scratching, into bed with the clerk.

Night passes over the plains. The stubble weeds rustle sharply. The feathergrass on the barrow rattles. Microscopic Mar Junction lost to sight in the plains.

Mixed train No. 58, creeping across the inky plains.

People: human legs, arms, bellies, heads, backs and droppings; people as thick in lice as the waggon are in people. People herded in it maintain their right to travel by sheer force of their fists, because out there, in the famine districts, scores of famine refugees rush the train at every station, struggling inside over heads and backs and necks and legs over other people—and these strike out, and those strike out, tearing off and throwing down those already aboard. The scrimmage going on till the train starts and bears off those that happen at the moment to be stuck on—and then those that had got in the last time get ready for another fight at the next station.

They travel for days twixt filth and cleanliness, and have learned to sleep sitting, standing, or dangling. The horsebox, lengthwise and crosswise in several layers, holds wide shelves, and on these bunks and under them, on the floor and on the shelves and in every crevice, sitting, standing, lying, are people, huddled, silent—storing up their noise for the stations. The air in the coach is shattered by human bowels and homemade tobacco. At night the waggon is in darkness; the doors and ventilators are all closed. It is cold in the waggon; the wind whistles through the cracks. Somebody croaks as he breathes,

somebody scratches; and the waggon creaks like an old swung four-in-hand. It is impossible to move in the waggon, as one man's legs are on another's chest and a third sleeps on top of them both, with his feet on the first one's neck. And yet—they do move. . . .

One man, whose lungs, no doubt, are nearly eaten away, instinctively huddles against the outer door, and folk press by him, men and women, and force the door a little open, and hang or squat over the endless sleepers and ease nature—so the man learned all the tricky private ways each man or woman had.

This man, burning in the final glow of tuberculosis, has strange muddled sensations. Thoughts of stoicism and honour, his own little room, his pamphlets and his books, and the famine—have gone to the devil. After innumerable sleepless nights his thoughts have differentiated like those of a man in fever, and he feels his 'I' turning into two, then three; and his right hand living and thinking on its own, independently, and quarrelling about something with his split-up 'I.'

Days and nights, waggon after waggon, station hamlets, third classes, footboards, roofs—all mixed up—and let em walk over him, spit on him, drop their lice on him. Stoicism-pamphlets on socialism and tuberculosis and books about God—he thinks of a new and strange brotherhood: of falling, mown down by sleep, and clinging to another man—whom, why him? A syphilitic? Typhus? Warming him and being warmed himself by the warmth of his body . . . horns, whistles, bells. . . . His brains seem to be tipped on to down, and because down is always hot and burning, his thoughts are burning and strange, persistent and passionate, on the borderland of the nirvana of fever. . . .

And it rattles, that joist of the door, rattles, and the door creaks, and women, women, women, squat and dangle over the chain of sleepers. Now, sex . . .

Yesterday at a small station a peasant woman had wanted to get in. A soldier was standing at the door.

'Darling,' the woman said, 'for the love of Jesus, darling, let me in. There's no room anywhere, you see, darling.'

'No room, Auntie! Don't you try. There aint no room at all,' said the soldier.

'For the love of Jesus Christ our . . .'

'How 'll you pay me back?'

'That 'll be alright.'

'Are you on for . . .?'

"That 'll be alright . . . we shant quarrel about that. . . ."

'Right-ho! Come along. Get under that there bunk. There's our coats. Eh, Seymon, let the wench in.'

The soldier crawled under the bunk, the people crowded round, and the tubercular man's heart filled with the sweetest and most bestial pain—he had a longing to cry out and let out and fling himself on the first woman that came along and be as hard and as cruel as he could and there and then in front of them all rape her and rape her and rape her. Reasoning, decency, shame, stoicism—to hell with all that! What we need is the beast!

Again the door frame rocks to and fro in his brain. . . . Women, swarming, crowding, women . . . his personality going two ways to the very point of pain, so clearly divided and his heart persistently warring with something in his breast. . . . The waggon creaks and bumps as it creeps along.

He falls asleep standing, and, mown down by sleep, he falls at somebody's feet. Something falls sprawling on him. He sleeps sweetly, as dead sound as a stone. The whole waggon is dead asleep. . . . A station, whistles, bumping. . . . For a moment he awakens. His head, with his 'I' twofold, threefold, tenfold, is lying on a woman's naked belly. Under his nose is a putrid smell like rotting fish; his thoughts flock to and fro like gawdy peasant wenches at a fair—God damn it—animals and instinct; and he kisses the naked woman flesh, kisses and kisses, passionately and painfully—who is she, where from?

And the peasant woman slowly woke up, scratched herself, muttered sleepily

'Enough, you rogue' . . . then . . . 'my, you are a dab though . . .'

And her breathing grew fast and irregular.

The steppes; a waste; endless expanse; dark and icy cold.

At the station where the train met the sunrise they ran to the empty wells and to standing pools for water, and lit fires to get warm and cook potato—and there in the empty waggon they noticed a corpse: an old man; the day before he had been in the agonies of typhus; now he was dead.

A dull grey turgid dawn. From the black crevice of the steppe horizon blows a cold and evil wind. The clouds run low—there will be snow. The track, the waggons; swarming people. The red light of fires and the smell of smoke. At the fires where they are cooking there are people pulling off shirts and blouses and breeches and petticoats and shaking out the lice and cracking the nits. People travelling for weeks through the plains—in search of corn. Nothing to make bread of; no salt to be had. They gobble their potato. The train has stopped; it may stand there a day, it may stand two. . . . Now, at day-break, in their hundreds they swarm over the surrounding villages (the further out the squatter the cottages and the higher the stacks) and little groups of them are begging. Women standing outside windows, bowing low, chanting and whining!

‘Oh, give me allll-llums for the saaaake of the Loooord.’

The train may stand for a day, may stand for two. The guards go to the clerk-in-charge and from him to the *extraordinary committee*. The whites have been here; the station consists of a closed waggon taken off the rails, a row of waggons, holes broken in for doors. In the office—a dark waggon—a smoking sheetiron stove, a smell of sealingwax, wires humming, people crowding.

One man whispers something in the clerk’s ear.

‘Impossible, impossible,’ says the clerk in a contented bass voice. ‘Fully made up. Seventyfive waggons, one hundred and fifty bogies. Impossible. . . .’

Braid strokes braid, hand brushing hand; the man slips the bundle of notes across.

‘Comrades, it’s quite out of the question! I only accept when I can do something, but in this case—seventyfive waggons, one hundred and fifty bogies. I really cant.’

Once more braid strokes braid—that is, suggesting a little *lubrication*. . . .

But yet it seems the clerk could. Late in the afternoon another train comes in, new hundreds light fires, squash lice—and at night this train is the first to leave.

They run to the clerk, and he isnt to be found, another man is on duty (it was so-and-so, the guards pacify them—and he’s gone off duty, cant you hear. . . . Dont you know that this very week he’s been attacked seven times) . . . and they run to the

Extraordinary—but by nightfall a detachment of Red Guards turns up, and combs through that train.

A Red Guard climbs into a hushed waggon.

‘Come on, who’s here? Out with it!’

An old man on the bunks takes off his cap and passes it round.

‘Let’s make it up between us, lads,’ he says, ‘two and a half each man. . . .’

At the next sunup that train leaves.

The clerk appears on the platform, and thousands of voices from the train bid him farewell

‘Swiiiiine! Briiibe-takeeerrrr!’

The train goes at a walking pace. The waste of the steppes. Cold and famine. By day a sleepy sun rises above the waste. In the autumn silence flights of rooks, mournful rooks, fly over the pillaged fields. From the cottages, these mournful cottages of rare hamlets, rises the bluish smoke of burning straw.

During the night it snows, and the earth meets the morning with winter; but together with the snow comes warmth and once more it is autumn. It comes on to rain, and the earth, swept by a chill wind, wrapped in a wet sky, weeps. The snow lies in grey tatters. The rimy mist is like grey wadding.

Nobody in the village of Old Kourdium, that lies in the hollows by a stream in the steppe like so many scattered fly turds, knows that just over there, where the horizon is, Asia sprawls.

In the village of Old Kourdium, in the Russian quarter, in the Tartar quarter and Finnish quarter—in squat barns in front of the cottages, in stacks behind the cottages, are stores of corn, wheat, barley, rye, oats—food. All their harvesting’s done; it is their season of rest and repose.

This very day in the Russian quarter of Old Kourdium the steam bath is put on. The bathhouse is a mudlump building down by the stream. The village girls carry in the water, bare-foot; inside the proprietor dissolves his ashes and collects rags, and they all go to steam themselves—the old peasants and sons-in-law and children and mothers and wives and daughters-in-law and virgins—all together. There are no chimneys out

of the bathhouse—and in carbon dioxide and steam and red glow and confusion the white human bodies jostle, all washing in the same lye; and the proprietor gives everybody's back a rub and then they all run down to the stream for a dip, in the mist-rimy early grey morning. The snow is beginning to collect in the hollows by the stream.

And in the Tartar quarter, on the opposite bank, where the minaret rises, at this moment (it being after Friday) the Tartars spread out their mats and pray to the east to the sun they cannot see, and then wash hands and feet, and in stockinged feet and flat caps make their way to a round hut spread with carpets and cushions, and sit on the floor in the centre of it, and eat mutton, champing away, with fingers dripping grease. And the old man gets the eyes. The women (who, it appears, are not expected to pray or to eat) stand behind the men with jugs of water.

And at this moment the band of folk foraging for food arrives at Old Kourdium.

By the common, by the long arm of the shadoof at the well, stands a tightpressed group of Finns, the women with horns on their heads, and legs like timbers; and squat little peasants with bast beards and hats like earthenware bowls, and tunics down to below their knees, belted round the chest, and embroidered tails hanging from their belts: a savage little race more silent than the sphinxes of antiquity. A miserable little peasant runs up to the incomers, and, squirming and squatting and screwing and screwing up his bloodless face, whispers

'Silba mony give . . . mony. . . . Givee bahlly, givee wheatee. . . Silba mony. . . .'

and then runs back to his own folk.

A woman with horns and legs like timbers takes his place.

'Silba mony' she says, 'givee. Givee bahlly, givee wheeetee,' and then she in her turn smiles and screws up her eyes and runs back, and her eyes are like sunflower seeds, and dull like worndown soldiers' buttons.

Out of the bathhouse in a hollow nearby springs a stark naked wench, with her hair streaming down her back, and rushes madly to the stream, and from there to her cottage and then back to the bathhouse. From the opposite bank of the stream come Tartars, on horseback, their legs dangling loose,

and their brats and the barking of dogs go with them. The Tartars surround the incomers, and their legs dangle to and fro as they hold their horses in and reach out to shake hands. One of them, with a villainous laugh, cries out

'Buy ferom me, a am d sovyat and d camittee and d cammisar! Buy ferom me. Hunderad roubals. Hungary? I bartar.'

He smiles craftily.

'Come alonga me. I roas a shape. I am d savyat. I say wan d sal. Wan I say not d don sal. Don go to d odders.'

The snow lies grey and tattered, the rimy mist is like wadding, and no end to the space of the plains can be seen. Nobody in the village of Old Kourdium is aware that just over there where the horizon is sprawls Asia. A peasant woman—that very same that the soldier let in the train, thinks

'Rye if you reckon it in flannelette isnt bad at ten roubles, or if you reckon in money, a hundred . . . and tick too, print and gingham—black alpaca too, for old women. . . .'

A couple of men with bundles under their arms come along the street. The woman is standing by the well. One of the couple comes stealthily up to her, and stealthily asks

'Mistress, wont you be changing some flour for some goods?'

'And what goods may it be?' is her question.

'Cotton goods, I mean. All kinds.'

'Wait you a while. . . . You come into the house that I be show you. . . .'

She signs to them. They go up to the cottage. They knock foreheads on the lintel and go in. Half the cottage is taken up by the low stove, on which are an old woman and a halfdozen miserable brats; in one corner of the cottage is a pig, in the eikon corner the master of the house, and eikons and a lithographed general and the imperial family.

They cross themselves. They bow to each other. They shake hands, first the master of the house, then everybody else in turn. Then they ask for food—and eat without a word, ravenously, wolfing—pork, mutton, kasha, pork dripping, gruel, bread, more dripping, more mutton. In the eikon corner sits the master of the house; watches them without a word—his eyes lost in his beard.

He calls his daughter-in-law.

'Dounka,' he orders, 'make ready the bath.'

They go to ablute, and while they are steaming Dounka brings them water to sluice down. When they come back the master says to Dounka

'Dounka, get the urn hot.'

And to his visitors he says

'Well, and what sort of goods have you got, show em!'

The men unfasten their bundles. The master looks on with a businesslike eye, in silence. The women—his own women and others who have pushed their way into the cottage—fasten on to the goods like flies at honey. One of the men lays some sort of scrap of red on the mistress of the house and pokes her in the side and cries playfully.

'Look, master. Twenty years younger—looks younger than the youngest gal here. Now then, missus, you'd better be getting up there on the stove, this'll ginger him.'

'Oh, dear. What are you saying!'

—and she spreads like a pancake.

But the pedlar ingratiatingly warps a kind of cheviot meant for breeches round his knees, and sticks his knee out before them all and praises his goods. The women pick out useful things and useless things too. The second pedlar engages the master of the house—about the harvest and the war and the famine and how there in Moscow the people have got as much madepolam and sewing machines and print as they want, and how in Moscow people drop dead in the streets from starvation.

Tea is served. They all poise their saucers on their five fingers and sup their tea. When a halfdozen cups have been put away the master of the house props himself up on his elbow and asks, dourly

'Well, and what about the price, eh?'

The women make for the door, their faces now naïvely indifferent, lurkingly afraid—their lord and master has come into the game.

'Your goods are our money,' the fellow is ready with his words—'we want flour.'

'We know that. Flour here costs sixtytwo the poud.'

The visitor's face is distorted in pain and offence, and like a peasant woman he whines.

'A-a-ah . . . you value your own goods, you dont value ours. . . . A-a-ah? . . . and who put the price on? We, of course

... a-ah? ... we can drop dead in the streets for want of food, and yet you're out to skin us clean. ... A-a-ah! Who put the price on? Who put the price on? We, of course ... a-a-ah?'

Once more the saucers were poised, and they drink, and once more they bargain. Then again saucers and supping; and once again bargaining. The women, submissively silent, keep over by the door. For the tenth time the old woman on the stove asks

'Who's come?'

The lads, after having chased them round the whole village, have now joined the girls in the porch. The little pig snorts. The cockerels under the stove try to crow.

At last up go both parties' hands, and palms are clapped together; the bargain is done; all they'd brought, sold at three arshins the poud. 'The master of the house is satisfied, because he has diddled the pedlars. 'The pedlars are satisfied, because they have diddled the master of the house. He treats them once more to a meal—shtchee with pork and wheat pancakes with butter, and cream, and kasha with mutton dripping—and then takes them to the inn to drink moonshine vodka. Varangian times.

Wisps of hay flutter in the grey wind mournfully from the grid on the wall of the inn. All over the village dogs keep barking. In the 'Tartar quarter, where they washed their *marchants'* feet and entertained them on the floor, crowds drag from cottage to cottage at the heels of the foragers. The lifeless Finns stand, no children with them, all like so much timber. Through the small windows the endless, borderless steppe can be seen. From the steppe a cold wind blows, it is raining, the earth weeping. In the inn the peasants drink moonshine vodka, and, half drunk, go to the Tartar Commissar to pay him for permission to take the rye they'd sold to the station; the carting will be done by night, hidden by a load of timber.

Both reds and whites have passed through the village of Old Kourdium a number of times, and whole streets have been wasted and razed. The people of Old Kourdium are simply buried by their corn, and they have swine and cattle which they feed on corn; but they live by the light of flares and light their flares with flint and steel and live halfnaked. Over the plains, in vast waves, come and go ravaging bands and counter-

revolution and make the nights lurid with the flares of distant faraway burning houses, and clamorous with the loud clang of the tocsin. . . . There are no young men in the village of Old Kourdium; some have gone to join the whites, some have gone to join the reds.

Twilight. In the grey twilight a soldier's wife of thirty (sweet it is at night kissing with such a soldier's wife) stops a man. He is burning low with the last glow of tuberculosis. She beckons him and whispers

'Come wi me, laddie. Dere's nobody back dere. I'll give you corn. D bahd is ready.'

And in her bathhouse, in the lurid glimmering, the man sees on the woman's belly and groin an even cold rose-marble syphilitic rash. . . .

Through the twilight the muezzin, a peasant like them all, frenetically cries something from the minaret. In the twilight the Tartars pray, their mats spread out, their eyes eastward into unseen Asia.

The last black necklace of rooks at their mournful wedding flies past.

And mixed train No. 57, loaded with people and with food, creeps back across the plains.

And Mar Junction, where in the old days staffs were not even exchanged, is having a fabulous career; the dreams of the young clerk are coming true. A *Preventive Detachment* (excise, that is) has taken up quarters there, and now trains stand for days on end in the station. And day and night there are fires alight and crowds about the station. There is no longer a drop of water in wells or pools. They go two versts for water, to a little river. You cant walk two steps without treading in human droppings. The sanitary waggons are full of patients. From the Excisemen's train, out of which machine guns poke their solemn snouts, comes the sound of jolly singing and of a dozen harmonicas; but all round is groans, cries, weepings, prayers, curses. The clerk is curt with the chief excise officer—he knows very well what gold braid stroking gold braid means—it is in his power

to send a train on after ten minutes, or not till twentyfour hours. He has it in his power to let a train in and out during the night, when the excisemen *do not work for want of light*—and now he has women, drink, money, new clothes, first-rate tobacco, chocolates from Einem and Sio, and talks like a fieldmarshal—curtly; and now he has no time for loafing wearily up and down the platform.

Train No. 57, plundered by the black plains, creeps along—a mixed train, cramful of people, flour and filth. . . . Into the waste of night falls and falls the damp snow; the wind whirls; the waggons rattle. Night. Pitch darkness. Cold. And for a lot longer the red fires will glow at Mar Junction, terrible as the dull flare of fever. In the waggons, where there are people sitting, people standing on people, nobody sleeps, yet the silence is deadly. The train gradually slows down, in the hollow night, to a stop, the wheels groaning. There are fires burning, and by the fires in the snow, people huddled, sacks lying on the ground. The station cottage is dead silent. In the inky night the train guards gather in a group. Mixed train No. 57; snow; hurricane. A couple go away; come back. For a moment the clerk appears at the door of the house and says something, like a fieldmarshal.

Silence.

Whispers.

And the guards run quickly through the waggons.

Inky darkness inside the waggons. The guard shuts the door behind him. No one speaks.

Then

‘What is it?’

asks a hoarse voice.

The guard breathes quickly; he seems to be pleased with things.

‘Lasses, and wenches,’ he whispers quickly, ‘it’s you I want. Orders; all lassies married or unmarried, the best of em, to be sent to em, to the Red Guards. . . . I can’t help it, he says. . . .’

None in the waggon speaks, there is nothing to be heard but the guards breathing.

‘Well, my lassies—well, my wenches, what about it?’

Silence.

‘The women’ll have to go. ‘Tis the only way out,’ says

someone in a surly voice. 'Flour, remember, we've got flour with us.'

Then another silence.

'Well, Manyoush, shall we be going?'—the voice sounds like a frayed fiddlestring.

Out from the train into the darkness into the snow, carefully go the women, and the doors are quickly closed behind them. The women, in dead silence, without a word, draw together into a tightpacked group. They wait. Somewhere nearby hum the telegraph wires. Someone comes up, peers at them and whispers

'All ready? all of you. . . . follow me. . . . No way out because of the flour. Save us, lassies! Now the lassies as is whole 'd better not go . . . hm? . . . Well. . . .

Then the women stand for a long while outside the last waggon of the Red Guards' train till a youth in an unbelted tunic runs up

'Ah, girls! Tired o waiting, eh? . . . We want some skirts—till payday comes round again,' he said, jocularly. 'But there 's a whole flock of you! Good God, we dont want as many as that—Jesus Christ! you are a hot lot. Now then, look lively, pick out about a score of the best looking of you for yourselves. And take care they're all sound.'

Night. Snow, steady, falling. The telegraph wires humming. The wind howling. The flames of the fires flickering.

In the station office the guards crowd round the clerk and fash their voices into a nasty sort of sugary, a revolting sort of wheedling tone, and they vie with each other in buying his goodwill—with melons, with spirits, with cognac (swill), with cigarettes, with tobacco, with cotton stuff, woollen stuff, tea. . . . The clerk, to while away the night, in his fieldmarshal tones tells smutty stories and the guards modestly look at the floor and snigger in a revolting sugary way. . . .

At sunup mixed train No. 57 whistles, strains with a sudden jerk, as if the bells of the bellpost were being torn off, grinds out of Mar Junction.

Food! . . .

Outside the junction, in the open plains, rises the barrow from which the junction got its name. Some time or other a

man was murdered near Mar, and on his gravestone an unknown hand had traced in straggling letters

*I once was what you are
You will be what I am*

Snow had now covered the endless plains and capped the barrow, and of the inscription on the gravestone all that remained visible was the two words

I once . . .

VALENTIN KATAEV

Valentin Kataev was born in 1897 and, while still a schoolboy, enrolled as a volunteer during the Great War. He was wounded and gassed. He had an adventurous time in the Ukraine in 1918-20. He had begun publishing already before the Revolution. His first works were stories in the realistic manner, written under the obvious influence of Bunin. In 1923-1925 Kataev wrote a series of successful humorous sketches: Edward the Idler, Sir Henry and the Devil. In 1926 he published The Embezzlers, his most successful satirical novel. Kataev's later productions are more purely narrative, as, for example, his Five-Year Plan "chronicle," Speed Up, Time! (1933). Kataev has also written a number of plays, gay, social comedies for the most part. The Squaring of the Circle is based upon Comsomol life. Kataev is one of the most talented of the "Fellow-Travellers."

THE GOLDEN PEN

THE academician's golden pen, so long overlooked in an elegant travelling-case, had lost none of its finesse. Green, glossy lines swirled into place in the wake of its thrifty course, directed by an old, experienced hand, and a couple of pages, sparingly written in a firm hand, famous throughout the length and breadth of Russia, and thrice revised to the very last comma, lay drying under a blotter in the left-hand corner of the writing-desk. Six days back, after breakfast, the academician had locked himself in, taken off his grey coat, rolled up the sleeves of his starched shirt, donned a pair of large, round spectacles—which made his bony, eagle-like head resemble an owl's, pulled nearer a stack of faultlessly cut paper, and, rolling himself a cigarette with his long, parchment-like fingers, had written the first line of his tale about the old, dying prince.

From that minute he had become like ice.

With the exception of the maid, who brought him coffee twice a day, and of his wife, who came in to change the water of the earthenware pot with chrysanthemums, nobody entered the study. The customary day of reception had been put off. Even the most intimate and important personages were refused

admittance, and the swarthy, cloaked Italian lieutenant, the refined attaché to the staff of the volunteer army, which was resisting the Reds' southern drive, who had brought Mr. Shevelev the letter and greetings of Gabrielle d'Annunzio, had been compelled to get back into his car, disappointed at having to leave his message with the maid.

The academician quitted his study only twice a day, once at midday, when he set off on his invariable walk, and again towards seven, when he dined. These habits were insurmountable. The walk was brisk and lasted half an hour. In that time the academician walked as far as the main square, descended the main street towards the sea-front, swept the shaggy, deserted sea with his keen, eagle eyes, walked past the granite plinth, from which fell the empress's mantle in would-be classical array, crossed the bridge, and passing by the detached houses with their variegated shutters, coats-of-arms and cast-iron gates—which reminded one magically of Florence—he returned homewards.

On his way, Mr. Shevelev sought relaxation from the pleasant but exhausting work of creation by calling on tobacconists, buying newspapers, and stopping attentively in the vicinity of the excited groups of people filling the square.

Four-wheelers smacked along the streets, lorries rattled window-panes and shop-fronts, the bayonets of the officer-patrols swayed in the air and cigarette-vendors cried their sing-song. Every corner was thronged with idlers, who gaped at Chinamen juggling with balls and knives, and political gossip here blended easily with roars of laughter. The academician, garbed in a short black overcoat, which disclosed a pair of long, lean legs from the knee downwards, muffled in a grey scarf, and wearing a black skull-cap, flanked by the sharp, knotted points of his ears, mixed with the people—on whom he was reputed to be a fine authority—and chatted with strangers.

He set questions and let off colloquialisms. There was much that was significant and menacing in these running questions, and much spite and cunning poison in the replies, but the academician, preoccupied as he was with his dying prince and the polishing of his periods, failed to observe anything.

He failed to observe that, with every day, the town grew noisier and more disturbed. Each day multiplied the throngs of ragged

officers and civilians laden with baggage. With each day the price of bread mounted, and, as it rose, the gossip in the squares became more disconnected and vindictive, whilst the newspaper leaders became more and more guarded.

Shevelev had no desire to know what was happening and remained tranquil. His faith in the volunteer army was unshakable. Only his wife, a thin, blue-eyed, young and beautiful woman, who used to entertain in his absence, had some inkling of the real state of affairs. But she dared not broach the subject. And should anybody, at dinner, happen to hint the danger, Mr. Shevelev would raise a parchment face and eyes that were puffed as from crying, and would say sharply:

"Gentlemen, I am too convinced of the inevitable end of Communism to be alarmed at such childish apprehensions. Only half an hour ago, General Tregubov rang me up and confirmed—do you hear, absolutely and definitely confirmed—that there was not the slightest ground for any sort of alarm."

"But, Georgyi . . ." His wife softly protested, dropping her blue eyes and trying to talk as convincingly as possible.

Mr. Shevelev interrupted her.

"No objections will disconcert me. There is no army in the world which has not experienced momentary setbacks. I am even prepared to admit extremely serious setbacks, but that ought not to change the general state of affairs. It's all very clear to me."

And, setting his face in a wooden mask, he continued his meal. His wife cast imploring and hopeless glances on every side, as if she were looking for help, and her look of distress said: "Well, what can I do? It's not in my power to convince him!"

Each day, however, made the position of the volunteer army more desperate. The retreat, undertaken by the high command in accordance with all the rules of French and British strategy, was catastrophically turning into a rout. The discipline was slackening. Detachments of troops, tormented by cold and hunger, were laying the country bare for miles around and were making for the forests and the villages of the south. They plundered the Jewish settlements on their way and blew up the wells. Nobody believed any longer either in the possibility of victory, or even in that of ever arresting the flight.

Rigorous orders went out daily condemning deserters to immediate death. But that did not help in the least. The authorities were impotent.

One after another the foreign missions were abandoning the town.

There was scarcely a vestige of authority left. The Reds were unswervingly closing in on the town, and with each day their loop became more of a noose.

But the academician's golden pen went on as sparingly as ever laying down its polished lines, which told of the end of the old prince, and the elderly elbows pressed as firmly as ever on the writing-desk. Nothing disturbed the silence of this large, well-lighted study with its bright, polished parquet floor, the portraits in their oval frames, and the chrysanthemums.

Only once was that silence disturbed, when General Tregubov in creaking patent-leather boots and clinking spurs had, insisting on the absolute necessity of an audience, penetrated into the study. The conversation lasted five minutes. Outlining the real state of affairs in a few brief and energetic words and confirming once more—on the word of honour of an acting-general!—that no anxiety need yet be felt for the fate of the town, he asserted frankly and laconically, and with all the disarming and blunt simplicity of a soldier who had often looked death square in the eye, that all authority was at a discount, but that even that might be set right if only the honourable academician would not refuse the favour of a newspaper article. He realized, of course, that an academician's lofty art ought not to stoop to newspaper articles, but, taking it into consideration that the defence of the town demanded sacrifice, he hoped to receive the honourable academician's support. The article, if possible, ought to be written with the least delay.

A sharp, slanting wrinkle split the academician's forehead. His face clouded over. He asked briefly and brusquely:

"Will it suit you, general, if the article be ready by eleven o'clock to-morrow morning?"

Oh, the general could not find words enough! They shook hands warmly, and were not destined to meet again.

The academician put aside his tale of the dying prince, locked the door, and did not leave the study till the following morning. All night through, words, steeped in bile and venom, crowded

one after another into the slanting lines. The greenish tobacco smoke stood densely in the room, and everything in the vicinity was strewn with ash and cigarette-ends. In the morning the article was sent off to the printers and set up, and the academican was left free to return to his dying prince. But the sight of the white paper and the writing-desk, a sight which would formerly stimulate him to work, now proved unbearable. His thoughts, losing their system and clarity, became intermittent, and his parchment face, turned now to a deeper tone of yellow, looked quite old. That day he could not write, and the following morning, when his article was being pasted up on the walls and kerb-stones, there came a sound of guns. Machine-guns rattled in the suburbs. In the harbour, departing boats threw up columns of smoke. Disorderly crowds distractedly thronged the squares and crossings. Orderlies on shaggy mounts and with dispatch-cases rode up to the staffs. The telephone operators were winding the wires. The shutters of the shops were shutting noisily. The sound of guns drew nearer. The academican's wife was rushing helplessly from room to room with bright, frightened eyes and a distraught expression. The telephone bell kept ringing every minute—the agitated telephone operators were confusing their numbers.

“Georgyi, this is terrible! We must leave! What shall we do? They will kill you!”

The academican sat sunk in the couch, and, gripping his knee with his bony fingers, biting his lips, and looking wan and old, sharply and angrily said:

“You know very well I’m not going anywhere. I’d rather be shot in this room.”

A few agitated, frightened acquaintances ran in for a minute to say good-bye, mouthed a lot of incomprehensible things and disappeared. The telephone bell rang once more. The wife ran and snatched the receiver.

“Hullo, hullo, I’m listening. Yes, at home.”

And she spoke rapidly and indistinctly.

“Georgyi, everything’s being arranged, it seems. It’s Koenig speaking. He suggests our going with him to Paris. There are cabins on the ship. He will give us all the money we want. Talk it over with him, for God’s sake!”

“Koenig.” The academican’s noble face grew squeamish.

A sharp, slanting wrinkle again split his forehead. His bile rose within him, though he preserved his outward calm. Creaking with his polished boots, and casting his reflection on the parquet floor, he walked up to the receiver with easy strides.

"Shevelev speaking. I'm listening."

Deep down in the centre of the receiver resounded a flurry of microscopic sounds—it was like the vibration of a gramophone record when the needle is touched. Somebody's far-away voice poured out a long and hurried stream of words. The academician listened attentively, bending over the receiver with a wry, polite smile.

"Thank you. . . . I regret, but I must remain for want of money. . . . What can I do. . . . But I'm very grateful to you, in any case. No. I can't go back on my decision. . . . Good-bye. . . . I'm very sorry, too. . . . You'll forgive me, won't you. . . . I'm touched. . . ."

He hung up the receiver. There were no more visitors and no more telephone calls. It was very quiet in the house, and only the window-panes quivered to the sound of the guns. Nor did anybody come to dinner.

The guns did not cease firing. They seemed to be thundering inside the town now. The machine-guns rattled away. The sirens of the steamers shrilled. The sky was lighting up in a blaze of fire. The misty blue radii of searchlights described brilliant arcs in the darkness. The electric current had been cut off and the detached houses drowned in obscurity. By morning it was all over. The decrees of the Revolutionary Committees were being posted up over the theatre and newspaper hoardings. Mounted patrols of tufted ragamuffins in caps, set off with red rags, hurried on sturdy stallions—whose manes and bridles were tressed with red ribbons—along the streets, covered in a layer of broken glass and twisted in nooses of tramway conduits. Blue-eyed Muscovites in short, yellow fur coats and meringo caps tapped the frozen pavements with the butts of rifles that had belonged to all the armies of the world, as they surrounded suspect houses, from which handy sailors in leather jackets hauled rapidly disguised enemy scouts.

Boys were already running through the streets with red flags and singing the *International*.

"This is the end," thought the academician, gripping his

knee with his bony fingers. He had no wish to run away or hide himself. His wife, with red, swollen eyes, stood, leaning against a wall, looking out of the window. But the bleak, aristocratic street was entirely deserted.

The proprietor of the house, a friend of the academician's, had been agitatedly running about town since morning, devoting all his energies and pulling all the strings to save Shevelev. At three o'clock he returned in a high state of excitement and waving a piece of paper, issued by the Revolutionary Committee. That was the safe-conduct, which assured the academician's life, freedom, and personal belongings.

"Here, friend, you're saved!" he said, entering the room.

Shevelev waved his hand in exasperation. He saw only too clearly that no mercy need be expected, though his life for European literature might have a value above that of a thousand others. He was too convinced of the savage cruelty of the Reds, whose hatred of aristocrats he measured reciprocally.

The safe-conduct was, nevertheless, pinned to the front door.

And then a detachment appeared at the beginning of the street.

The academician went up to the window. He had a clear view of these gay, ragged soldiers, decked in red ribbons and of the sailors' leather jackets. The tread of rough boots on the frozen asphalt rang hollow and harsh in the slender blue windows of the house. The detachment drew near. The sailors were snappily reading out the house-numbers, their hands ready on the straps of their revolvers.

Shevelev went to the door. He clenched his fists, and, with head held high and flashing eyes, ready to set his teeth in the throat of anyone who crossed the threshold of his room, he waited the end. His wife had lost consciousness. The rude blows of rifle-butts shook the front door. There were shouts:

"Hey, who's there? Open, or we'll . . . Open the door!"

The maid, with a face that had gone as white as chalk, beat a tattoo down the stairs with her high French heels. After her hurried the quaking proprietor, buttoning and unbuttoning his check velvet jacket. As through a dream, the academician heard the door being unbolted.

Strangers were tramping in the hall. He heard his friend's shrill, excited voice, and even made out some of the words.

"A safe-conduct. The Revolutionary Committee. An academician. A writer." He heard other words spoken in a gay Muscovite jargon: "Well, the devil take him! D'ye hear, brothers, an academician. Not to be touched. Let's go, brothers."

The door banged, and the academician saw the soldiers marching under his window. They were smoking. A silence again fell on the house. Shevelev went and sat down by his wife's side. A terrible weariness, an inexplicable bitterness, filled his heart; it was as if he had just returned from the funeral of a bosom friend.

1920.

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

Vsevolod Ivanov was born in 1895 in Turkestan. After finishing school, he wandered through Russia and was in turn worker, sailor, clown and actor. In 1917 he took part in the civil war in Turkestan and Siberia and fought in the ranks of the partisans and the Red Army. After the wars, in 1921, Ivanov joined the "Serapion Brothers." His literary career began in 1916, and he was both influenced and encouraged by Gorky. He became prominent in 1922-23 after the publication of his tales of partisan fighting in Siberia. The best known of these are The Partisans, Armoured Train N 14-69, Coloured Winds, Skyblue Sands. In 1926 Ivanov's work exhibits a psychological preoccupation, and his collection of stories, The Mystery of Mysteries (1927), was taken as evidence of the writer's bourgeois tendencies. In 1930 Ivanov returns to the portrayal of current actuality in novels about the Five-Year Plan—A Journey to the Country which does not Exist and The Stories of Brigadier Sinitzin. Ivanov, who is regarded as one of the leading "Fellow-Travellers," plays a prominent part in the life of Soviet literary organizations.

THE DESERT OF TOUB-KOY

I

HEY, you stubborn grasses! No horse, no stone even, has strength enough to crush or crunch such grass. And does that not explain why the mountain cliffs are so crumbly, brittle as the teeth of horses that impotently crumble against the grasses of Toub-Koy.

And over all, to the very glaciers, lowers a sky yellow as the sands of Toub-Koy.

And the stars upon it, one might say, were the scobs of the dry dung of spring-bucks.

But is that really so? For no one can tell whether there are any stars at all on that dirty yellow, colour-of-mouldering-straw, skinflint sky.

But, notwithstanding, there had come, braving these stubborn grasses, these sands, from somewhere in Tumien, through the

Ural and other steppes, to Comrade Omiehin's partisan detachment, the agitator, demonstrator and talker generally, Ievdokim Pietrovitch Glushkov.

More astonishing than his phraseology—which put to shame that of fifty newspapers—was his alabaster, girlish complexion. No suns of any desert could have ruffled that tenderest of skins, and he, without any pretence of blushing, boasted of his rhetoric and especially of his method of agitating.

He had brought his belongings on three donkeys. The first, nicknamed "Commander," carried a machine-gun in "good working order," according to the list. The others carried a "Cocq" film-camera, and, in a variegated turkman sack, the round boxes of film.

Glushkov's feet were bare, cracked, and chapped, and, for some reason, he let his trousers drag, and the turn-ups were clogged with thick yellow dust, just as if he had intentionally strewn a lot of sand there.

He stood at attention in front of Comrade Omiehin, and his face shone so pink he might have come from the glaciers.

"The secret of my astonishing effect on the masses depends on the explanations I give of the events of the antecedent social order and on the demonstration of the above-mentioned events and love dramas on the screen, by means of ordinary household electric installations, and the machine, worked by hand, called 'Cocq,' which, in Russian, means victory."

"Victory?" questioned Omiehin. And he looked at the hills of Toub-Koy, at the glaciers, which alone cleft the sky, and where the White detachments had vanished without leaving a trace.

"Of victory there can be no doubt," answered Glushkov. And his teeth shone whiter than his alabaster face.

"That may be," said Omiehin. "We're not against bourgeois culture, if there's any sense in it. . . . Let's see what you've got."

Omiehin's detachment had been scouring the dunes of Mongolia for over a year now, and for the last ten months the horses had been crunching the stubborn grasses of the steppe, and Comrade Omiehin had begun to forget many things.

Taking a few strides, he stopped and stared at the three exhausted donkeys, at the fat gadflies buzzing round them, and

at Glushkov, who was unpacking his "Cocq" camera on a piece of felt.

"So, you've got something about love?"

"Preferably about love, comrade."

"Pity. Death'd be more suitable."

"We'll make the necessary adaptations."

Only the glaciers, gleaming with hatred of the heat, only they cleave the sky. High and ringing are the hills of Toub-Koy.

And as he strode off to his tent, Omiehin muttered hoarsely:

"We'll do all the adapting, if necessary."

II

In the middle of the reel, when the smooth and oily ne'er-do-well had confessed his love for the lady in the long train, and his rival, a malodorous, bald-headed villain, was playing peeping-Tom behind a curtain, when Glushkov had just mentally put the finishing touches to one of his amazing speeches, a dozen of which would have sufficed to bring the old world down in ruins, there galloped up to the detachment an auxiliary force of Ufim Tartars, who had arrived by secret tracks.

The screen grew dark, the partisans roared "Hurrah," and the Cossack, Lukashka, swiftly cut a mare's throat with his curved knife. In honour of the guests the liquor-stills were washed as thoroughly as though intended for the preparation of medicines, and, in accordance with the custom of the steppe, Omiehin, with his own fingers, placed the first morsel of roasted goat into the mouth of Maxim Semeonovitch Paleyka, the commander of the Tartar detachment.

"I place myself under your direct command," said Paleyka, quickly swallowing the morsel.

"Eat your fill," answered Omiehin, moving the dish nearer. "In connection with the picture, I would remark that, from the point of view of human utility, love calls up a feeling of self-pity."

"That doesn't follow. . . . Life does not prevent loving, and especially giving birth. And what is life without birth. My idea would be to have only one woman. Or, to put it figuratively,

and by way of allegory—one that would hang round your neck and not leave go.”

“I don’t approve,” protested Omiehin.

It was on the tip of his tongue to question Paleyka about his bourgeois origin, but at that moment a mountain-horn sang out with a sound so slender it might have been evaporating in the air, which was as dry as flame.

The riders leapt on to their horses.

The Cossack Lukashka, who had cut down the mare, led in two Kirghiz. In their fear, trying to sit straight in the saddle after the Russian manner, they said the *ak-rus* (white people from the glaciers) were outflanking Omiehin’s detachment, and were, on the way, driving off the Kirghiz flocks; and that the tribal chiefs were getting ready to cut down the *djataks*.

“We’re *djataks* ourselves,” they said. “Take us in. We came of our own free will.”

“*Djatak* means a poor man,” Glushkov translated for his own benefit. “Essential to note it and make use of it in the speech, when I finish my film demonstration. . . .”

The days here are as dry as the wind, and the boredom of life in these parts is drier and simpler than the wind, and the wind buries the ends of life with coarse yellow sand.

Thus, another three partisans had set out in the morning to gather fuel, and had not returned.

In the vale of Kaiga guards remained to watch over the reserve droves of horses, the empty tents, the three donkeys pasturing by the *saksauls*,¹ and the agitator Glushkov, who, out of boredom, was sleeping on a stone by his reel of film.

The guards were telling tales of priests’ wives and workers. An unslaked nostalgia for woman’s body dripped from their lips, and Glushkov woke at the question:

“You don’t say there are women like that off the films? We’ll assume they’ve all had their throats cut. If not—we’ll finish the job. Why give yourself such airs, you bitch, when we’re all suffering here, eh?”

Glushkov awoke. He felt hot and uncomfortable in his soiled clothes. He fingered his hot and perspiring belly, and thought to himself: was he really wise to exhibit such ribs in the desert. And with a curse, unusual for him, he added:

¹ A cactus-like bush that grows in Turkestan.

"I'll cut the above-mentioned section from the reel."

At that very moment, on one of the dark tracks, a horse shied with a clatter of hooves.

The dark-cherry light of a resinous chip lighted up Omiehin's rugged chin, the blood on the horse's hooves and a man's chest, cut in a star-shaped wound. The horse's hoof had sunk to the fetlock in the man's chest.

It was one of three partisans who had gone to gather fuel that morning.

Coarse sand buried the ends of life in these parts.

Paleyka adjusted the straps of his revolver and said quietly to Omiehin:

"I suggest we put the corpse aside. And don't take any prisoners."

The words fluttered from mane to mane, from fur cap to fur cap, like the indistinct sound of cartridges being inserted into the breech.

"No prisoners."

"Ex—actly," whispered the last man of the detachment, looking over his shoulder into the impenetrable darkness. "Ex—actly. No prisoners."

In the battle near the mountain village, Tatchi, as you know, Colonel Kanashivili was killed, seventy-three of the ataman's followers were cut down, and Kanashivili's brother was made prisoner.

The mountain torrent took no prisoners. Water becomes turbid from blood only in songs, and the mists in the mountains remained as multitudinous as ever.

"Shoot him," said Paleyka, without looking at the prisoner. He was unsuccessfully groping for his matches, for he had not smoked all night, and it was, of course, more agreeable to hold a cigarette than a sword in one's hand.

"Comrade. . . ."

Omiehin struck a match for him. Such attention surprised Paleyka, and he even bowed.

"Thank you, Comrade Omiehin."

Omiehin struck another match, and, holding the tiny, burning splinter in his hand, said:

"But, comrade, in so far as she is a woman, and not the brother. . . ."

Paleyka groped again for his matches.

"I suggest we shoot her in half an hour. I'll question her myself. So, it's no brother, but the wife?" he asked Omiehin, for some reason.

The latter shook his head, and Paleyka also lowered his head.

"And the wife . . . can also be shot."

"She, too," confirmed Omiehin. And then, of a sudden, Paleyka felt his cigarette was pulling at last.

It was dawn. Friday. The Tartars were skilfully slaughtering the mares: and with as great assurance as if their glitter were the source of their happiness, with as great daring, glittered the glaciers of Toub-Koy.

III

"We've questioned her. She doesn't need a guard; her clay hut's so strong, you only have to touch it, and it will crumble and crush her. There'd be no time even to finish her off with a bullet. The houses they build nowadays! Pottery's harder. She knows what she's in for."

Paleyka liked talking about the Great War. He used to recount how, at the taking of Lvov, a black-haired Madyar girl had fallen in love with him for his bravery, and how he had wished to marry her. The marriage did not take place as the army abandoned Lvov, but she had made him a present of a dozen bright blue silk handkerchiefs.

He then used to pull out one of these handkerchiefs, and, if need be, bury his nose in it.

And so it happened now: he fumbled for the handkerchief, and his riding-breeches spread out over the stone he was sitting on.

"You've questioned her, Maxim Semeonovitch?"

Paleyka raised his handkerchief. Five Tartars waited behind Omiehin, lazily shuffling their feet.

"As to questioning, I've questioned her. I must warn you, however, that the Georgian in question is not the wife, but the sister of Kanashivili. She's called Helena, and is, what's more, a virgin. She has agreed to give exhaustive information about the bandit bands, to show us the outflanking tracks, and also all the bandits' liaisons with the town."

But by the firmness with which Paleyka uttered the last sentence, Omiehin realized that he was lying. A wave of heat flowed from his lips to his ears, then fell on his neck, and it seemed to him as if he were retracting.

"I agree to postponing the execution. I'll finish questioning her myself, Comrade Paleyka."

"Very glad. As you are an old hand in political affairs, and have made a thorough study of them during your prolonged stay in the steppe . . . haven't you any links with the town, if one were to dispatch her there?"

The red flag was the only link, and, as it was, the winds and rains had worn it thin.

Eccentric Paleyka, blue as a spring sky your soul!

Omiehin went up to the decrepit Kirghiz clay hut. Several partisans were peeping through round holes that had been bored in the back wall of the hut, were pushing for places, swearing and plucking each other forcibly by the sleeves.

"Devil, what the hell are you doing? You've ripped my sleeve off! You can sew it on now!"

"And you've stuck your head in, like a bug. Hey, you've gone all red with the blood you've gorged. Give others a chance. . . ."

A lean peasant, wan as his old shabby soldier's coat, was firmly shouldering his way between two sturdy Tartars. The sides of his soldier's coat, as they hung down over his tightly belted waist, entirely hid the wide thong with its twisted ends, and his elbows stuck into the Tartars' sides.

"Just a peep, brothers, with one eye," begged the sickly looking fellow. "Just one peep, won't you. . . ."

Another, a slender, nimble fellow in a short coat, to which he had managed to give the appearance of a natty caftan, and barefooted, slipped like an eel between two smooth round backs and found a peephole for himself right under the peasant's elbow. The caftan-wearer's dry feet scraped inaudibly against the Tartars' heavy boots.

He gave a squeal of delight.

"Ai, what a waman! . . . Does nothing but pownder and pownder herself."

The throng gave a roar of laughter.

"You dan't say she's still powndering herself? There's a hag

for you, the third day now. Another wouldn't have dried her tears yet, were she a Russian, and this one doesn't care a damn. . . ."

"She's a Pole."

"And maybe a Jewess, only a white one."

"They say her husband's a general. They didn't catch him."

"What does she want a husband for? He wasn't with the detachment at all. She managed herself, like a commander. A devil of a woman, in trousers, with a dagger, and a painted face. . . ."

A fresh band of would-be observers pressed towards the peepholes, pulling at each other's elbows. One old bullet-riddled soldier's coat tore and hung in a fold to the ground. Its owner, without so much as turning, found the guilty one's head with his fist. The latter's forage cap tilted over his eyes. Furious, he began hitting out wildly at the crush around him. Grey soldiers' coats blended in one cursing, swaying, and dishevelled heap.

Omiehin, who had long been unwillingly watching the soldiers, strode up, with his hand on his heavy pistol.

"Stop there. You're not a fly! Where are you crawling? Where're the sentries? Get out of the way there, I tell you."

The peasants broke apart, as if come unstuck, and a pungent odour of perspiration hit Omiehin.

"She hasn't stopped powndering herself," came a hoarse whisper from behind.

Omiehin made his way past the partisans and looked for a peephole at his own level.

He could find no peephole at that level. He looked round.

"Where does one look here?"

"Try a little lower, brother. A little lower."

Omiehin discontentedly pulled his forage cap on a little tighter, and, bending almost double, peeped in. He saw nothing at first; the narrow window-pane set near the ceiling gave but little light. The hut was quite empty. It smelled of ash. Two dirty strips of pine-tree benches, or, rather, one long narrow bench, and, sitting upon it, one could now see clearly, a woman in a white Circassian costume. Two plaits hung straight down her back. The plaits looked green. The face could not be seen, as it was turned towards the light of the window. On

her knees, a white fur cap. A round mirror had sunk deeply into the smoothly combed lambskin. Close by, on a block of wood, lay a sky-blue, round, flat box. In her hands the woman held a powder-puff. She was moving it over her face and twisting her head in front of the mirror. Her face was gradually turning away from Omiehin. He had evidently leant too heavily: the decrepit clay brick wall gave a dry crack. The woman quickly gathered her legs in their black patent-leather boots under the bench and looked round. There was an ever-stronger whiff of moist ash. Her grey eyes, glowing with hate, explored the wall. Her eyebrows hung low over her eyes; or was it her eyelashes reached her brows?

"Sss . . . swine . . ." she hissed rather than said.

A pale, burnt out, lifeless, introspective face, not easy to approach. Roving, aggressive eyes.

Omiehin turned away from the peephole and shuddered, as if those impetuous, lightning-bearing insects had run across his chest.

Paleyka's hand closed in a firm, friendly way on his shoulder. His fingers were dirty and untidy as a ragged broom.

"Have you questioned her?"

"Just going to," answered Omiehin.

"We might dispatch her with a letter. The men are undesirably excited. You've noticed that, Alexei Pietrovitch?"

Omiehin, pursing his wide mouth, quickly said:

"It seems, Comrade Paleyka, that you're taking a greater interest in her than . . . Her shop's here; she won't go much farther than her powder-box. Yes. . . . It's no good talking to her. I'll question her. I'll question her. . . ." repeated Omiehin.

Their voices were low, carrying little farther than their compressed lips and short breathing, but the prisoner's ear was keen. She pressed herself with her whole body against the wall of the hut. And her body was so hot and flaming! The shaggy grey wall took in, inhaled her heat, and grew quite warm. Very warm. It would not be at all surprising if the warmth she communicated would touch, reach the faces of the men standing by. The cheeks of one of them flushed, and then the ears caught fire.

"I don't agree with you. As military commander, I should be absolutely the first to learn any information she has to give."

Paleyka, of a sudden, turned sharply, military fashion, saluted silently and strode away, skirting the tents.

Omiehin shouted in his wake:

"Hold, Maxim! We must thrash out any misunderstanding. Believe me. . . .

These last words he muttered already in his stride, as he threw back the long folds of his soldier's coat with his knees.

"We'll talk it over in the forest," Paleyka threw over his shoulder.

"In the forest?"

"In the forest. It's not convenient here."

IV

Omiehin threw his soldier's coat on to a *saksaoul* shrub. A pale-blue bird that seemed a stranger to the region flew out from under the shrub.

"A good spot for a grave," he thought.

Paleyka strode ahead, waving his arms in a loose, unsoldierly way.

. . . He may take it into his head to go as far as the hills. And if not to the hills, to the very crags of Kagi. That's five miles, no less. And five miles, in good language, is a dog's run.

There was smoke of fires in the valley. The horses of the partisans tore off the blades of grass as though they were branches. The hills looked like tents in which Death might have been sleeping.

The glaciers alone had cleft the sky.

The glaciers laughed coldly at the desert.

. . . "Is he really making for the hills?"

. . . "You won't reach them, brother; not in this melancholy waste."

. . . We all of us fall short of a destination. There was another summer in Petersburg, where there are no hills and where the sea is kept in check by smooth cliffs of men's fashioning. But even there a desert wind blows, sweeping through the streets and parching lips already dry. In Labyagyi, my native country, a bird would lead its yellow fledgelings from among the stones to the clear waters. I have not seen them. Books

reminded me of this. Petersburg tracks are straight and level, and I haven't gone far, after all, with my nostalgia. . . .

Paleyka, exhausted, fell prostrate on the ground.

The *saksaoul* bit into the thin cloth with its sharp thorns and tore the prostrate body. Warm rain, thought the shrub with displeasure.

Omiehin, all out of breath, halted beside him. His lips were crisp as bark. Omiehin might have been eating corks all his life.

"You, I see, Maxim, are really. . . ," he would like to have said, but as always when about to venture on a speech, he shuffled his feet and bent up the sole of his right foot.

"It happens," he pronounced.

And such a stillness succeeded, that from a neighbouring shrub, some four inches from the stalk, suddenly leapt out a bluish mouse. "Iukhtach" they call it, which means greedy. Its slightly hooked nose looked musing and majestic.

Paleyka raised himself on his elbows and silently pulled out his gun. His mouth gaped; one of his teeth had, apparently, overgrown the others, and was, into the bargain, the yellowest of all.

He turned a perspiring head towards Omiehin and said:

"Fire!"

Omiehin made to retreat, but Paleyka took aim, and Omiehin whispered:

"Good God, Maxim Semeonovitch, why should I fire at you?"

"At the mouse, not at me. Whoever hits will get her. Fire in God's name!"

"You're mad! I've never shot at mice with a gun."

"Fire! I'm counting two. Whoever hits, takes her. Our revolvers are different bores. Fire I tell you."

The mouse pricked up its ears, raised its tail, took a breath, and got ready to run . . . and suddenly, losing awareness of himself, Omiehin whispered:

"Count!"

The woman lay on a bench, her fur cap spread under her head. When Paleyka sprang into the hut and hurriedly bolted

the door, she raised herself quickly and sat up, gripping the edge of the bench with her hands.

"I'll scream. What do you want?"

Paleyka, without replying, struck a match, lit a small candle-end, and looked round for a place to set it. The woman narrowed her eyes as if preparing to make a dash, then quickly bent his arm at the elbow and said:

"Stand like that!"

She carefully pulled out of the pocket of her blouse a round mirror and from the side-pocket of her skirt a powder-box, and, opening the blue box, she began to powder herself, without so much as a glance at Paleyka, who was standing motionless, holding the light for her.

When her nose had grown whiter than her face, she touched her lips slightly with a lipstick, then smiled with onerous lightness.

"That's better."

She put away her powder and lipstick and glanced at Paleyka. The mirror remained in her hands. She stretched herself, and once more bringing the mirror up to her nose, brushed Paleyka's chest with her hand.

"Stand off."

Paleyka—but not in answer to her hand, which had only flicked him like a bee—stepped back.

The candle flashed its reflection in the mirror. He wished to blow it out, but his lips had gone dry.

She sat down again and set the mirror on her knees.

"Well, and are you going to be as dumb as the last time? And what do you really want of me? I know quite well where you're sending me in the morning, and I won't tell you anything. Not that I know anything."

She thought for a moment. And something, it might almost have been a water-spider, flickered over her cheek. That spider has a droll name—*msia*.

"I'd like to leave after me . . ."

"To me?"

"Not to you at all, but generally. I think my plaits would do for that. Let them live on. . . . I love them."

She laid both her plaits together on her breast, and played with their downy ends.

"She's cunning," thought Paleyka angrily, feeling the insistent moisture of emotion in his nose.

And he said in a low voice:

"You won't ask anything more serious? You may have something else?"

"How funny! But this is very serious. . . ."

"But surely, couldn't you count on me in the way of, let us suppose, some slight help. We could, in the last resort, scrape along somehow."

"Help. . . . Pshaw! And besides . . . you must understand. Whoever serves, or generally acts in some way or other in life, with boors, himself loses all nobility. And I don't accept services from those deprived of nobility. You'd better go. I've no more need of you. Thanks for the candle-end. Yes, and another thing: let me do my hair for to-morrow, for I won't have time to-morrow. Will you hold the candle for me?"

The woman quietly, and with a gesture as studied as her words, began to undo her hair.

Paleyka quickly set down the candle-end on the floor. His big, unwieldy shadow flashed over the wall, then broke near the ceiling. Thence it became transformed into a log. He sat down by the woman, and, without giving her time to collect herself, caught her hands.

"Help? Yes? Fie, how disgusting, only to think of it. Go away. And you dare touch me: your hands are filthy. Look, your nails are broken, short, yellow . . . like cigarette-ends. . . ."

She wiped her plump hands disgustedly on the skirt of her Circassian coat. The mirror suddenly slipped from her knees and fell on the floor, breaking in two.

The woman looked in a frightened way at the splinters, and picking them up as if she could not believe her eyes, looked at herself, and burst out crying, stamping her feet and shouting shrilly:

"There's only sorrow, misfortune, and loss from you! I hate you, I hate you! Get out! I know you'll shoot me to-morrow, I know . . . but there's no need to break the mirror!"

She threw herself on the bench, and, gathering her knees under her and burying her head in her fur cap, began sobbing. Her plaits, hanging down to the floor, jerked, quivered, and shiftily unplaited themselves.

"There's a devil for you!" said Paleyka hoarsely. His throat was parched, as if lined with blotting-paper. "'There's a devil, being sorry for her mirror. Superstition, that's all it is.'"

He grew silent. His fingers found the handkerchief in his pocket. It was the last of the madyar handkerchiefs. A little frayed at the edges. Paleyka would never have such handkerchiefs again. No such tuneful love again. An end of it.

"I'll leave it."

The woman kept silent.

"I'll leave it here, by you. My bride gave it me. She's doubtless dead by now. I'm not suggesting you should love me, but just that, if you feel any sympathy, hang it up where I can see it. As I see it: you have a long life ahead of you, because according to certain calculations, I propose postponing your execution."

"I wear boots, but not yet trousers. Will you take the handkerchief out of the way."

Paleyka obstinately walked up to the bench, meticulously spread out the handkerchief, and, banging the door tightly, said sternly to the two Tartar guards:

"Keep your eyes peeled. She's a bitch."

The Tartar only spat over the edge of his lips.

"We know."

He raised his rifle and spat again.

"We know everything, commander."

Seeing him enter, Omiehin sat up on his plank-bed.

"How was she?"

"Not bad."

"Did you talk?"

Paleyka, with a sweep of his bushy eyebrows, roared with laughter.

"You have a lucky way with women, Comrade Paleyka. Hi, hi! a lucky way. I'm no mean shot, even though I missed to make you happy. And what did I miss—a mouse. She was willing?" . . .

"Of course."

"Women are scum. We killed her brother, slaughtered a good few, and here she is on the fourth day . . . You can marry now. We'll have a lot of bother with her now."

"What bother? We'll send her off to her destination."

"And what about you, Comrade Paleyka?"

"I had my fun—and enough."

"Yes . . . both good and bad. A lucky way you have with women, Comrade Paleyka."

"Yes, a lucky way," sighed Paleyka.

The sands do not cool in a night, like the heart. The sands spread themselves over the entire desert, as blood through the body. Who will shelter the *saksaouls* from the whirlwinds? Clouds of sand whirl round the *saksaouls*.

VI

The plank-bed was harder than a saddle. The soldier's coat had most impossible seams. Not seams, but cables. Tomorrow, the body would, for certain, be covered in red weals, the imprints of thick, coarse, tailor's seams. He would have liked to have laid the tailor responsible for them with his tenderest spot upon those seams. He would have enjoyed seeing the tailor twist, groan, and scratch himself. But it was not only because of the seams that one had to scratch oneself. Omiehin, tossing, muttered:

"Seams . . . lice. . . ."

Still, no harm would have been done in calling the tailor to order, to make him sew more accurately. I regret to inform you, but . . .

"The devil take this life! You sit like a louse on a frying pan—grease all around and nothing to eat. If one had at least a woman to set against this life."

"The commissar's sleeping already on the other side of the wall. Snoring like a boar, for sure. . . ."

Omiehin was listening.

"And not a breath. Means he's content."

"Eh, drat him, I've got him marked!"

He pulled out his tobacco pouch, and smoked a pipe. He lay down again, covering himself with one fold of his coat. It was as stifling as in a retail shop. The patrol galloped past. He had slept for years on that coat and had not been cramped, and now . . . And he suddenly recalled the smell of the Bogorodsky grass. Five wishes to be wished at that smell, if it were sensed in a dream by a maiden. . . . And here came the

patrol. Better think of ploughing. Ploughing on a hot spring morning. Ploughing . . . pause . . . power . . . plunder . . . and lust. . . .

When bored he used to read a dictionary of foreign words, all of which were Russian. . . . Foreign was printed to help the sales. Funny.

. . . An Easter-cake kind of night. With the smell of Easter baking in the air. A moon, probably, and strange mountains. The moon here makes every day an Easter. . . .

He threw off his soldier's coat. The buttons struck sharply on the wall. Omiehin pulled out his boots from under the cover of the bed.

"I'll go and inspect the sentries."

Trying not to clink with his spurs, he began to pull on his boots.

But then he distinctly heard a woman scream, the roar of several voices, and then a shot rang out, and, strangely enough, did not re-echo in the mountains. As in a dream—where an echo can never be heard.

Omiehin stumbled over the threshold.

A lantern flickered by the hut and a partisan kept knocking against the glass with a hurriedly girded sword. An unheard-of gabble of voices rose there. Dogs howled in the brushwood beyond the camp.

"Quiet, there! Will you . . ."

A partisan in an ample caftan caught hold of his hand, and, laughingly, pointed to three Tartars, and shouted in his ear as loudly as if shots were still being fired:

"Just look at them . . . look at those mugs. They were hot. . . ."

"What's the matter, lads, eh?"

In a corner of the hut sobbed the woman, holding in one hand a knife and in the other her fur cap. She was probably ashamed of being seen in tears, and that is why she squealed in an unbearably high-pitched voice:

"Monsters, executioners! To-day it was the commissar, and now it's the whole pack. . . . Shoot me, but stop tormenting me! Do it this minute! Reptiles!"

Omiehin, unfastening his holster, glanced at the stooping Tartar, one of the sentinels.

"Well . . . ?"

The Tartar stood at attention. His face suddenly flushed and his temples grew puffed. He looked round at the others.

"No woman. Bore it four months, when Ufa went away, no woman. She'll be shot to-morrow any case. The commissar had his fun, we too must have little-little fun. He . . ."

The Tartar pointed plaintively to his straggly beard, over which blood was dripping.

"He knife—straight here, began stabbing me. Why we have no woman?"

The partisan in the caftan guffawed.

"That mug, brother, look, that mug! Wants a woman! Suffer, cur, suffer as the Revolution suffers you, eh?"

And in a perfect transport of delight he slapped his rifle against his boots.

"They let off a squib to impress her. . . . We'd better lock her in."

"Lock her in," said Omiehin irritably. "Bar and bolt. You keep guard for a while." He motioned to the caftan-bearer.

The latter, for some reason, unsheathed his sword and froze to the spot, only his teeth grinned in the dark, and they could be seen, it seemed, a good ten yards away from the hut, where Omiehin had withdrawn with the Tartars and Paleyka.

The stones the lanterns stood on were warm, seemed to be perspiring. An ill-flavoured wind slightly ruffled the folds of the soldiers' coats.

"In so far . . ." began Omiehin, fixing the stone.

A candle was dripping, and there wasn't a fool to right it, and Omiehin as a result felt increasingly irritable.

"In so far as the commanding force of our famous partisan detachment failed to do its duty by not finishing with her at once, and as her continued presence among us will disgrace our detachment altogether, I find it absolutely necessary to pronounce—without further delay—the revolutionary sentence. In the absence of mitigating circumstances in the anarchist behaviour of the sentinels Gadeyin, Alim Kashi, and Zakia Kazimbaev, they are sentenced to the utmost penalty, but, taking into account their unawareness, the sentence be accounted conditional. Until the execution, they are to keep guard over the citizeness . . . and thereby wash off their guilt. Otherwise—

to the devil. Understand? Any objections? Has anyone any objections?"

"None," said Paleyka.

With his eyes still fixed on the stone, Omiehin said to the Tartars:

"You're condemned conditionally to be shot. To your places and no nonsense on guard. Understand?"

The Tartars suddenly fell back, catching hold of each other's hands.

"Well?"

"Eh, understand, Alexei Petrovitch, eh?"

And the stooping Tartar bowed low, almost to the ground.

"Eh. . . ."

"I take the liberty to report," said Paleyka. "They may not have understood. Perhaps I'd better explain?"

"No explanations. They're not asking for mercy. It's clear."

VII

In the morning tracks were found leading from the hut towards the hills. Four horses had galloped, and, on the lightest, on Paleyka's dun-coloured ambler, on the outside of the other three, had apparently ridden—Helena Kanashivili herself.

There are all sorts of events in life, just as there is every kind of water in rivers, but Omiehin saw a very turbid world that morning. He sat in the saddle, sticking out a pair of long, dry legs, and looked on irritably as Paleyka picked a horse for himself out of the drove.

"What are you going to do about it?" he shouted. "Looks as if you'd slept with the woman badly since she's beat it. You must have made a bad job of it."

Paleyka, with a yell, struck his whip into the drove. The horses scattered, a clatter of hooves rang out behind the tent, and out rode Paleyka on an unsaddled horse.

"Commander . . . want to ride without a saddle? You're not a gadfly. Give him a saddle."

The Tartars caught Paleyka.

"I'll give you my saddle for luck," said Omiehin. "But not the horse. You'll let it slip through your fingers."

Six other riders galloped after Paleyka.

Paleyka dashed on alone, off the beaten track, stumbling over bushes, stones, and ditches. His horse, as he tugged at the curb, often reared, twisting and turning on the same spot, and even attempted to throw off a rider whose wishes it did not comprehend.

It was as if he were pursuing the runaways and at the same time riding away from Omiehin.

Nevertheless, Omiehin caught up with him at the sharp bend of a mountain track, near the mountain Ai-ol. Swinging round at the clatter of hooves, Paleyka yelled out:

"They'll kill us like cockroaches, Alexei Pietrovitch. There are four of them."

Omiehin sat in his saddle as safely as over a book, over the dictionary of foreign words he so heartily despised. His legs were pressed firmly into the horse's flanks and he looked square, blunt, and dull.

Six miles from the camp, they perceived, a few paces from the track, the corpse of the runaway guard, Alim Kashi. His skull had been cleft with a sword. The blade had slipped farther and had cut open his jacket, revealing a hollow, tubercular chest.

"It only needs a woman," said Omiehin, without getting off his horse. "I think he must have refused to go into the hills with them. He refused to become a traitor to the working class. So bury him, or the wolves will make short work of him."

Arid, wind-swept cliffs showed darkly in the distance. They had to squeeze their horses' flanks strongly with their knees, till the blood came, to make them summon their remaining strength.

And there, by the Agatov cliff, lay the prostrate body of the partisan horse and rider—the guard Gadeyin. He was a handsome, six-foot lad, gay and fond of laughter. His twisted arms had got entangled in the bridle. His horse's deformed head lay beside him.

Gadeyin was still alive.

He raised his numbed eyelids and almost inaudibly, as if with his eyelids, asked Omiehin:

"Come to shoot? Pity I ran from your bullet. One's own was surer. He says—let's run, he'll kill, we'll be shot anyway.

Kashi says—let's run. Zakia says—let's run, we'll be shot all the same. Ha, where's a Tartar to run from his own rifle? . . . Ha . . . Zakia no woman. Zakia ran. Zakia shot me in head, as woman ask. Don't shoot me in the face, Alexei Pietrovitch, shoot straight in the heart."

"Yes," said Omiehin, gathering up his reins, "it will be soon over. Very likely he didn't understand the meaning of 'conditionally.' What does conditionally mean?" he flung back.

A forward lad from Penza straightened himself in the saddle.

"Conditionally—means, Comrade Commissar, those who ought to be shot, but who were taken pity on, because they were good fellows."

The nearest hill was covered to the waist with a skirt of brushwood, and continued beyond, naked and craggy. A horse was pasturing among the bushes. Lifting up its swollen lips, it gaily plucked the prickly grass. The arrival of men did not alarm it.

It had rested and refreshed itself, and neighed joyously. In advance, some distance away from the horse, a corpse lay, face downwards, on the stony track. It had dug its dirty fingers into a crevice in the stone.

Four revolver bullets had been plugged into its back, neck, and head. All absolutely unnecessarily and aimlessly.

"That's a woman's work," said Omiehin.

And from that point continued the track of a single horse.

Omiehin glanced at the mountains. The brushwood came to an end and revealed naked stone. A mountain village showed grey somewhere among the high snows. Smoke spiralled among the crags. The rocks wafted an eternal heat.

Omiehin pulled his left rein, and himself swung to the right.

"Enough! We'll get plugged ourselves farther on. About turn, comrade. Take the horse. Pity about your ambler, Maxim Semeonovitch, but God grant we'll catch her one day."

Behind his back he heard Paleyka whisper:

"Did you notice, comrade—that last one had clutched her hair. . . ."

"What about it?"

"And he was the ugliest of the lot. Zakia, who killed them all. He just had time to clutch her by the hair. . . ."

Omiehin reined in his horse, and, drawing level with Paleyka,

bent over him so that he smelled the odour of kumiss and goat's cheese.

"Well, and even if he did clutch her hair. . . . One ought to pull such women by the hair, and not get killed."

VIII

They rode in silence as far as the torrent, which flowed in the near vicinity of the camp. And when the hooves startled the hand-made wooden bridge and the water seemed to whirl even faster, Paleyka caught up with Omiehin. Holding on to the bow of his saddle, he muttered:

"It was all lies I told you, Alexei Petrovitch, sheer lies. She may be his wife, his sister perhaps . . . or a Polish spy. I did not sleep with her. Nothing happened. And it's a pity you missed the mouse. Better I'd missed it. I only made her a present of the blue handkerchief."

"Well?"

"That she might show it, if she had any sympathetic inclinations, but she . . ."

Omiehin suddenly turned heavily in the saddle and shouted with what looked like disappointment:

"And she's taken it?"

Paleyka's dry cheek-bones flushed hotly, his bridle slipped out of his hand, and he lied:

"She burnt it. She showed me the ash, after the Tartars. The ash. How much is there from silk? As much as from a cigarette."

A viscous warmth filled Omiehin's veins. He felt sleepy; his stirrup dragged and felt uncomfortable.

"The devil take her," he said lazily. "We must make out a protocol and have it all in order. I'd like to see the hut again, in the daylight, and how they got out. A pity about the Tartars. . . ."

To the door of the hut, just by the cramp-iron, was nailed Paleyka's blue silk handkerchief.

"So," said Omiehin musingly, looking on as Paleyka hurriedly and even without getting off his horse, grabbed at the handkerchief, "so, she's had her laugh at us, the bitch. If I meet her six bullets won't be enough."

Riding off a short distance he halted, looked at Paleyka, shook his head, and, suddenly leaping down from his horse, strode towards his tent. A partisan, who was passing by, caught hold of his horse's bridle.

That evening Omiehin took down his rifle, reloaded, and, for some reason, though he liked the clink of spurs, pulled the spurs off his boots.

The rifle seemed unusually heavy; the night, unbearably sultry. And the only tolerable thing was that the gloom blotted out the hills.

He sat down not far from the bridge across the torrent. There seemed to be less water. And it wafted a fragrant mountain odour.

That was the second night Omiehin had not slept, and that is why everything tasted salt to him. His temples felt swollen, and the night gloom appeared intolerably endless.

Under his feet he seemed to hear the patter-patter of tiny pebbles, sharp as needles. The fires of the camp went out, and soon the returning patrol crossed the bridge. The peasants were laughing loudly, and one of them threw a handful of mountain-nuts into the torrent.

Omiehin sat like that for a long time. A cramping pain in his veins gripped his legs. He had laid the rifle aside. Somewhere in the sky flashed a yellow-green spot of dawn, and then he heard the muffled beat of hooves.

The rider, coming from the direction of the camp, slowly neared the bridge. He halted for a short while, and then, in a loud whisper, urged on his mount. The horse struck out sharply with its hooves.

"You—Paleyka?" challenged Omiehin.

The rider started and exclaimed unnaturally loudly:

"I!"

"Lift your head higher. I'll show you where to run."

Omiehin, according to regulations, hugged the butt of his rifle firmly to his shoulder.

The horse shied at the shot, took two jumps, and galloped with an empty saddle back to the camp.

Omiehin turned over the corpse, and, from a side-pocket, pulled out a packet enveloped in a blue madyar handkerchief. It contained a little money and Paleyka's documents. He threw

both the documents and the money into the water after the corpse, whilst he thrust the handkerchief into his pocket.

Then, for no apparent reason, he lit a fire. Lighting a cigarette, he spread out the handkerchief in front of him. He then picked up a flaming branch and stuck it through the middle of the handkerchief. A smell of burning rose, and Omiehin, with the same stick, threw the handkerchief into the fire. To the staff secretary who came up, he said:

"To-day I'd like to see the end of the picture the Tartars interrupted. It would be interesting to know what moral came of their love."

"You can't see the end, Comrade Commissar," the secretary replied.

"And why can't I see the end?"

"Because it's two weeks already since the demonstrator, Comrade Glushkov, took another road, with your permission changing his donkeys for horses, because the donkeys, as you know, were eaten by the wolves for want of looking after."

"Two weeks?"

"Exactly so."

"My, how life runs. Life runs straight . . ." but he did not finish saying how exactly his life ran. Comrade Omiehin did not finish. He only smiled.

Stone in the mountains is dull and stingy. Gay and green is the earth under it. The flame of the sun grew dim in the mountains, and clouds, as ashes on man's fire, covered the stones.

But the grass was near to hand. Hey, you stubborn grass: there is no crunching or crushing it. And yet, over these stubborn grasses, over these sands, from somewhere in Tumien, across the Ural and other steppes, through Comrade Omiehin's detachment, made his way farther, the agitator, demonstrator and talker generally, Ievdokim Pietrovitch Glushkov.

LYDIA SEIFULINA

Lydia Seifulina was born in 1899 in the Orenburg District. Her father was a converted Tartar, her mother a peasant woman. On finishing school, she became a village school-teacher, and also worked as a librarian and for the county council in the Urals and Siberia. After the Revolution, she finished a higher training course and continued her school work. In 1921 she began writing and soon became prominent. The Lawbreakers is the story that brought her most to the attention of the public. It is the story of one of the numerous waifs and strays of the early days of the Revolution and of the moral reformation operated by "practical" and virile, as against theoretical, methods. In 1923 Seifulina published Mulch, a tale, which, in naturalistic colours, depicted the civil war on the borders of European and Asiatic Russia. Her tale, Virineya, later dramatized, portrayed the new type of common woman who, under the influence of the Revolution, was throwing off the old morality and was becoming a conscious constructor of a new life. ¶

Seifulina's works were popular until 1926-27, when both readers and critics lost enthusiasm. Of late Soviet criticism has often reproached her for treating only of the negative side of reality and for being inspired with a spirit of opposition. Her tale of peasant life, Self-Praise, gave rise to a special polemic on this topic in 1931.

THE LAWBREAKERS

THEY caught him at the station. He was buying food from the market women. He met the accustomed arrest gaily. Winking at the grey man with the rifle, he asked:

"Where are you taking me, comrade? To the Ortcheka or the Gubcheka?"

The latter even spat out at this.

"Well, there's a terror! Been through everything, one can see."

They conducted him to the Ortcheka. And then to the Gubcheka. In the Gubcheka office he sat quietly on the floor waiting his turn. When questioned, he replied willingly and gaily.

"What's your name?"

"Grigoryi Ivanovitch Peskov."

"Which province do you come from?" the commandant questioned squeamishly and indistinctly.

"A very distant one. Don't think I'd find my way back. Ivano-Voznessensk."

"And how did you get to Siberia?"

"You call this Siberia! I've been farther afield."

And he looked proudly round those present as he said it.

"But what devil brought you here from Ivano-Voznessensk?"

He corrected gravely:

"No devil, the train."

And at the friendly laughter of the soldiers and of the man who was scratching the paper with a pen, he only spat a solid gob on the floor.

"I came by train, comrades. With the Americans. They brought a whole school of Petersburg children and teachers to recuperate in these parts. Their Red Cross, it must be. Not my business. Well, in a word, the Americans. Lenin had paid them for us, perhaps: gave them food for us, as it were. Well, and then Kolchak steps in. Some went on farther, others died. I was taken into a home, but then ran off to the country."

"And what did you do there?"

"Worked for a priest. Don't think I've always been such a bag-of-bones. I can do my bit of work, brother!"

"And did you volunteer for Kolchak?"

"I enrolled all right, but deserted."

"And how did you become a volunteer?"

"When the Reds came everybody bolted, and I bolted too. Then as I was at a loose end, I enrolled."

"Why did you bolt from the Reds? Were you afraid or what?"

"Afraid. . . . It's not a question of fear. I'm a red-party-man myself. But everybody bolted, so I bolted, too."

The soldiers once more guffawed. The commandant reproved them and ordered:

"Search him!"

As willingly he let himself be searched. He raised his arms as he was accustomed. His large grey eyes danced merrily in his sallow boyish face. Like sun spots, they put everything in the shade, even his starved, crumpled face, and his dishevelled, lice-ridden, dirty-straw-coloured head. They relieved the boy

of a large sum of money, a family-book with silver edges, a pound of tea and several yards of cloth from his knapsack.

"Where did you get the money?"

"Stole some and made the rest by hawking."

"What did you hawk?"

"Cigars, cigarettes, or I'd pinch something."

"You're a hard nut!" said the astonished commandant.
"And where are your parents?"

"They killed my father in the German war, and my mother's had a lot of children since. She went off somewhere with the new children, and fixed me up with the American train."

And his bright eyes once again met the commandant's dim glance. The latter shook his head. It was on the tip of his tongue to say: "A hopeless case." But the light in Grishka's eyes stopped him. He laughed and scratched his chin.

"And what did you do with Kolchak?"

"Nothing. Enrolled and deserted."

"So you belong to the Red Party?" the commandant remembered.

"Red, of course. May I take a whiff?"

"You ought to be thrashed for smoking. Here, light up. How old are you?"

"Fourteen. I took after St. Gregory."

"You know the Saints? And what are you doing with the family-book?"

"I've written my father down. He'll recognize me, and I'll have an easier time in heaven. Mother's forgotten, but Grishka remembers."

"In heaven, you think?"

"Where'd you think, then? The soul must find a resting place somewhere once it's left the human body."

The commandant looked darkly again.

"Well, enough! We'll have to detain you."

"In prison? All right. Your food's not too good. . . . All right. We'll sit it out. Good-bye."

They long remembered Grishka in the Tcheka.

He was soon called up before a commission for young offenders. He felt himself less at ease before the commission than in the Gubcheka. They were a jovial lot in the latter. Always ready to laugh. But here, they all looked commiserat-

ingly, and the doctor tormented him for what seemed an endless time.

"Why's the man trying so hard?" Grishka puzzled. "He's measured all my head and fingers. Suspects I'm somebody. They're evidently looking for somebody with a head like that. . . ."

Unpleasant, too, that the doctor examined him naked for quite a time. They scrubbed him clean in a bath, but the way the doctor kept looking, Grishka thought his body must be dirty. And then the doctor began questioning him about shameful things. Unpleasant. Grishka had seen much and had indulged himself. But there was no need to talk about such things. Made him sick to remember. And he wasn't feeling like indulging himself again. When he left the doctor, his face was red and his eyes were dim. The doctor, the nosey one, had reopened all his wounds.

Back in the Home at evening, he recovered his spirits in the company of the young offenders. He praised the food.

"This isn't any sort of Soviet hotch-potch, brother, in this dining room. They've provided milk. The gruel's sweet. Bits of meat in the soup. All right."

But the night was uncomfortable. The boys were constantly moving and the "teacher" kept shouting at them. He reminded one somehow of the doctor. Grishka could not fall asleep for a long time. He was speculating.

"It must be that I've got disused to pillows. They get in the way."

And he worried all night through in a half-somnolent state. He saw his mother. She was combing his hair and saying:

"You're growing up, Grishka, growing up, little son! When you grow up, we shall retire. You'll earn money and make your father and mother happy. . . . My own darling son!"

And she kissed him.

Miraculous! His eyes are open, he can see the lamp burning on the ceiling. He knows he is in a Home for waifs. And there can be no mother here. And yet his neck feels as if it had been kissed. And he would like to cry. But he swore like a grown-up, held his tears and turned over on the other side. And then he saw the doctor. Began remembering the women. And felt sick again. His heart contracted again. He wished to

pray, but could not remember "Our Father." He knew no other prayers. And so he tossed about all night.

The days succeeded one another. Life wasn't so bad, only extremely boring. After the morning meal, they would be conducted into a spacious hall. Sometimes they would read. But always boring things. One boy was goody-goody, another naughty. . . . He felt like kicking the goody-goody! And the lady-teachers kept fussing into the bargain:

"Come, children, let's sing and play. Come, form a ring."

And so they would form a ring. In the hall, together with the girls. The girls strut about and pipe the same tune about the Christmas tree, the hare and the round loaf. Or they would go swinging their arms and swaying their heads from side to side:

"Where branches bend over the lake . . ."

At first he was amused, then bored. His head, after all, wasn't government property. One would soon have enough of wagging and wagging it. The *International* was best of all! A fine and incomprehensible word. And much more like the grown-ups, too. That, brother, was one up on Christmas trees.

"Arise from your slumber, starvelings."

Fine! But that was as boring in the end. They had to sing it every day. He himself had sung it whenever he felt inclined. But there were times when he would rather not. Still, he battered soppy George's face because of the *International*. George was a bourgeois puppy. He had an aunt who brought him pies. George once said to Grishka:

"You should sing, 'a whole world of Jews and jew-jews.'"

But Grishka was a Red. He knew: Jews were people, too. They were used as a pretext to jeer at the Soviets. So he thrashed George. And life had been sad ever since. He had stood up for the Soviets, and the eldest aunt, Zina, and Konstantin Stepanitch labelled him a hooligan. And when the government linen disappeared, they questioned three of them. The three that had been thieves.

Grishka was amazed:

"Fools! And why should I begin stealing here? Their

food's good enough. And what are thieves? Anybody would steal on an empty belly. Wait till I bolt, then I'll steal sure enough."

The idea of running away grew stronger. Life had become so boring. They had promised to teach him a craft and hadn't done anything about it. They say they hadn't any tools. And he got bored to death cutting out paper "posters." He had taken the last one, when finished, and had stuck it on the lavatory wall with the pencil motto:

"This pharmacy for man's relief is the proper place for you. Grigoryi Peskov."

He wrote badly and slovenly, but this time he set it down clearly. His tutors had taken a dislike to him ever since that day. That was their look-out. That ginger-headed Konstantin Stepanitch was only fit to strum a guitar and take snaps. He'd managed to snap them all, the pimply one! And what a temper! He dare not fight, but his eyes sting like a snake. And the way he stares at people, you can see he's sniffing to know who's who. He himself smokes cigarettes out of the casement window of his room, but he tells the boys:

"An upright man ought not to smoke."

But smoking was a trifling affair. Look at the time he had done without smoking. He had lost the habit and desire. But as soon as Konstantin Stepanitch started his hurdy-gurdy about smoking and began cross-examining everybody, he felt like lighting up at once. And aunt Zina called them all darlings. And patted them on the head. She was sticky as honey. You could see she did not like patting them. And she only muddled everybody with her talk.

"You shouldn't do that, darling! Just think, you are being kept warm and clothed. You should button all your buttons and comb your hair. You're a big boy already. Would you like me to read you a book? You can draw in the meantime."

Honey witch! Muddling people with her questions. As it was, the children wrote down their likes and dislikes every day, their wishes and wants, and the books that pleased them. But Grishka angered her. On the last occasion, he refused to answer the questions, and wrote:

"I dislike and disapprove of all questions."

She even turned white. Then she laughed quietly, pursed her lips and came out with a wispy:

"Ugh, I don't like you! What an obstinate boy!"

Well, and don't. You can like George. He buttons all his buttons, rules his paper and answers all the questions as he ought. But as soon as she turns her back, he treats her improperly. And all the girls are vile. They all mimicked aunt Zina's piping voice and they did nothing but fawn and fawn. And on the quiet they misbehave with the boys. Manka from the mining district isn't a bad sort. She sings sad songs and likes reading.

She herself looks like wax and is all skin and bone. She's sickly. But Grishka doesn't talk to her. Afraid. He'd seen enough of girls and didn't like them. Grishka liked nobody. He had become sick of everything: of the dormitories with their uniform beds and of the dining-room with its new wooden tables. To escape! The children's home was situated in a nunnery. Behind high walls. And a sentry stood at the gate.

Grishka argued:

"That's right. We're lawbreakers. That's what we're called, young lawbreakers. Sounds important! In everyday language, thieves and criminals, but in a literate language, lawbreakers."

That appellation pleased him as much as the *International*. Grishka was proud both of it and of the sentry at the gate. But the sentry was in the way now. For he wished to escape.

Spring came. Nostalgia takes hold of you as soon as you go out into the fresh air. One's nostrils quiver like a dog's and one feels like flying. The sun waxed strong and warm. The snow began to melt. Canals had been dug and water could already be seen under the thin layers of ice. The sledges on the road no longer crunch, but splurge. And the horses' hooves go squelch-squelch, instead of tack-tack. The tree-branches showed bare, slender, and joyous. Sear, yellow leaves had quivered upon them in autumn and, in the interval, snow. Now they had stripped themselves of everything. And had grown very light and clean, recovered from their ailments. They breathe and cannot breathe enough. They appeal to the sky to quench their thirst. On the other side of the wall, boys acclaim Spring all day long with shouts and cries. Oh, to get out! . . . It's fine outside when one can play as one likes. But all these teachers' choirs and dances are only a torture. Games, as he played them, were another thing.

The nuns lived in the courtyard. They had been constrained, but not yet evicted. The bell clanged mournfully morning and evening. Black shadows would emerge from kennels and go smoothly, as if floating, towards the chapel. This latter was situated in one of the corners of the courtyard and its principal entrance gave on the street. The nuns, young and old, moved about lifelessly. Not as in the daytime, when they crossed the courtyard or when they bustled in the bakery. They looked alive then; they scolded the children and screamed. The boys teased them. They would spit in the well, and once they opened the church door and shouted:

“Lenin, Trotsky, Sovnarcom!”

The nuns lodged a complaint with the *Gubnarobraz*.¹ And ever since a war was afoot. And life became gayer. . . .

1921.

¹ Provincial Educational Establishment.

ISAAC BABEL

Isaac Babel was born in 1894 in Odessa of Jewish parents. He studied at the Commercial School and began writing at the age of fifteen, at first exclusively in French. In 1915 Babel went to Petersburg, where he was received and encouraged by Gorky. From 1917-1924 Babel led the active life of a soldier and served in Boudyony's cavalry. In 1923-1924 he went back to literature and wrote a number of books of short stories which were destined to bring him into the very front rank of Soviet writers. He published two volumes of short stories in 1925: Red Cavalry in 1927; and Stories of Odessa in 1928. Babel has not been in great favour with critics since, and has published very little, though he has written numerous stories and is now writing a novel. Babel is a romantic, a meticulous and ironic writer, fond of light and shade, of colour and violence, of sudden contrasts and heightened feelings. He is economical in his effects and has been compared to Flaubert and Maupassant. He remains one of the few Soviet writers who can still write in the personal vein.

THE END OF SAINT IPATY

YESTERDAY I visited the Ipaty monastery, and the monk Illarion, the last of the resident monks, conducted me through the house of the boyars Romanov.

The people of Moscow had come here in 1613 to beg Michail Feodorovitch to become their Tsar.

I saw the trampled corner where the nun Martha, the Tsar's mother, had prayed, her gloomy bedroom and the tower, from which she had watched the wolf-hunts in the Kostroma forests.

I crossed with Illarion over the tumble-down bridges, buried in snowdrifts, startled the crows that were nesting in boyar attics and emerged opposite a church of indescribable beauty.

Circled with a wreath of snow and adorned with carmine and azure, it lay against the smoky northern sky like a woman's motley neckerchief patterned in Russian colours.

The lines of its unluxuriant cupolas were chaste, its sky-blue

turrets were pot-bellied, and its ornamental trellised windows shone with unnecessary brilliance in the sun.

In this deserted church I found the iron gates which had been given as a present by Ivan the Terrible, and I made the round of the ancient eikons, of the whole of this crypt and decay of pitiless sanctity.

The saints—possessed naked peasants with putrefying ribs—postured on the ragged walls, and beside them hung a painting of the Russian Virgin: a meagre woman with parted knees and dragging breasts resembling a pair of superfluous green arms.

The ancient eikons gripped my unconcerned heart with the chill of my deadly passions, and I could hardly save myself from them, from these sepulchral saints.

Their god lay in the church, petrified and cleansed like a corpse that had been washed in its own house and then left unburied.

Father Illarion alone wandered among these corpses. He fell on his left knee and, drowsing, scratched his dirty beard and soon bored me.

Then I flung open the gates of Ivan IV, ran under the black vaults to the porch, and there the Volga flashed on my sight, all riveted in ice.

The smoke of Kostroma rose into the air, breaking through the snows. Peasants, clad in yellow haloes of frost, were driving sledge-loads of flour, and their hacks pounded the ice with their iron hooves.

Reddish hacks, girt with hoar and steam, breathed noisily on the river, while the rose lightnings of the North flew through the pine trees, and crowds, anonymous crowds, were crawling up ice-sheeted slopes.

A stinging wind blew upon them from the Volga. Many of the women collapsed in the snowdrifts, but the women advanced ever higher and bore upon the monastery with a buzz of besieging columns.

Women's laughter thundered over the hill, samovar pipes and basins were drifting up the ascent, and boys' skates grated at the turns.

Old women were dragging bundles up the high hill, the hill of Saint Ipaty, while babes slept on peacefully in their

tiny sledges, and white goats followed the old women on a lead.

"Devils," I shouted, seeing them and retreating before this unheard-of invasion. "Is it to the nun Martha you are coming to ask for her son, Michail Romanov, as Tsar?"

"Shut up, fool!" a woman replied, stepping forward. "What do you want, stopping us on the road? Are we to bear your children or what?"

And stooping to the sleigh, she pushed it into the monastery court, almost knocking the distracted Father Illarion off his feet. She pushed her basins into the cradle of the Moscow Tsars, called herself Savitch, and demanded apartment No. 19 in the head prelate's quarters.

To my surprise Savitch was given an apartment, as were others in her wake.

And it was explained to me, then, that the Union of Textile Workers had fitted out forty apartments for workers of the Kostroma United Linen Mills in the burnt-down wing, and that they were coming to settle in the monastery that day.

Father Illarion, standing by the gates, counted over all the goats and settlers; then he invited me to tea and silently brought out the cups which he had stolen from the palace when all the belongings of the boyars Romanov were being transferred to the museum.

We drank tea from these cups until perspiration ran down our faces; women's bare feet tramped before our eyes on the window-sills; the women were washing the windows of their new home.

Then the smoke gushed from all the chimneys; a strange cock alighted, as if intentionally, on the grave of the Abbot Sionia and crowed; an accordeon, after lingering on the opening bars, started up a sentimental song; and a strange old woman in a sheepskin coat, thrusting her head into Father Illarion's cell, asked him for the loan of a pinch of salt for her borstch.

It was evening already when the old woman called on us. Purple clouds swelled over the Volga, the thermometer on the outside wall pointed to 40 degrees of frost, gigantic flickering bonfires spurted on the river, and some undismayed lad still obstinately persisted in climbing up a frozen ladder to reach

the arch over the gate. He was climbing up in order to fasten a flimsy lantern and a notice, on which were represented a multitude of letters—U.S.S.R. and R.S.F.S.R.—and the arms of the Textile Union, the sickle and hammer, and a woman standing over a weaving loom from which beams radiated in all directions.

1925.

MICHAÏL ZOSHTCHENKO

Michaïl Zoshtchenko was born, of noble descent, in 1895, and studied at the Petersburg University. He served as an officer in the Great War, and was both wounded and gassed. But in 1918 he enrolled himself as a volunteer in the Red Army. He began to publish in 1921, when he joined the Petersburg group of "Serapion Brothers." His first works, The Tales of Nazar Illyitch, Mr. Sinebrukhov, gave evidence of a humour that was linked to profound and almost tragic motifs. Subsequently, Zoshtchenko's style and subject-matter became lighter, and he gained the reputation of leading Soviet humorist. Over ten volumes of his stories have been published, and among the best of them are: The Merry Life (1924), Hard Times (1926), The Joyous Adventurer (1927), Trifles, and What the Nightingale Sang (1927), Family Vitriol (1930), The Reminiscences of Mshelme Sinyagin (1932). At the present day Zoshtchenko is very much published in newspapers and weeklies. Soviet critics have repeatedly raised the question as to whether Zoshtchenko's art was bourgeois in spirit. In 1933, however, Zoshtchenko was once more recognized as a loyal supporter of the Soviets.

A MISTAKE

WHAT day is it to-day? Wednesday, it seems. Wednesday, of course. And that happened on Monday. On Monday our crowd almost split their sides with laughing. It was all so deucedly funny. The mistake, I mean.

The crux of the matter is that our crowd at the factory are all literate. Wake any man, in the middle of the night if you like, and force him to write down his name—he'll write it down.

For our *troika*¹ were a desperate lot. They liquidated all illiteracy in three months. The blockheads, of course, remained illiterate. They muddled their names. Gusev, for example, muddled everything. He'd write "es" in the wrong place, or let off a flourish before his time, or, again, he'd leave out the "ge." But the rest of the crowd managed all right.

And then, just imagine, in spite of this high general level, up crops a trifling case.

¹ *Troika*—a committee of three appointed to liquidate illiteracy.

And who'd notice the case if not the cashier, Jeremy Mironovitch. Saturday's pay-day, let us say. Well, on Monday the cashier checks his books to make sure that he hadn't made any slips. He clicks away on his abacus and, of course, spies a cross on his list. Signatures all around, and here, if you please, a cross in the column.

"What? A cross?" The cashier racks his brains. "Why a cross?"

And why, indeed, this cross, since illiteracy had been liquidated once and for all, and everybody could sign his name?

The cashier looked closer and saw that this cross stood right opposite the name of "Chlebnikov."

The cashier reported to the book-keeper, "A cross, if you please." The book-keeper to the secretary. And the secretary still further.

Then the workshops took up the discussion: what's the *troika* been doing! They couldn't liquidate illiteracy in that time, if you please.

The *predzavcom* hurries to the cash-office. He orders the cash-book to be given to him. The *troika*, too, had crowded into the cash-office. They all stare. And sure enough, there's a cross bang opposite the name of Chlebnikov.

"Who's this Chlebnikov?" they question. "Why wasn't this Chlebnikov liquidated? Why is everybody literate and enlightened, and why does Chlebnikov, alone, stray like a lost soul in the gloom? And how is that possible? What were the *troika* about and what were they thinking of?"

And the *troika* stand there shuffling their feet and shrugging their shoulders.

They summoned Chlebnikov. He turned out to be a qualified joiner. He came along unwillingly.

They ask him:

"Are you literate?"

"Literate," he says.

"Can you," they ask, "sign your name?"

"I can," he says. "They liquidated me for three months."

The *predzavcom* looked nonplussed. The *troika* shrugged their shoulders. The cashier brought out the cash-book.

They handed the cash-book to Chlebnikov. And they asked him:

"Who signed this cross?"

Chlebnikov stared and stared.

"Yes," he says, "the handwriting's mine. I signed the cross. I must have been terribly tight. My hand couldn't write straight."

A roar of laughter rose on all sides.

They shake Chlebnikov's hand.

"Well," they say, "that's a mountain off our shoulders. For we thought, we did, that you, Chlebnikov, were straying all this time like a lost soul in the gloom. . . ."

But the next pay-day, Chlebnikov, for all his literacy, once more scrawled a drunken cross. But nobody was surprised this time. They had grown accustomed. Besides, they knew the man was literate.

1926.

SECTION C

THE NEO-ROMANTICS AND POET PROSE WRITERS

KONSTANTIN FEDIN

Konstantin Fedin was born in 1892 in the Volga region. He was educated at a Commercial school and the Moscow Commercial Institute. In 1914 the war found him in Bavaria, where he was interned until 1918. Returning to Russia, he served in the Red Army and in various Soviet institutions. Fedin's literary activity dates from 1921, when, on Gorky's recommendation, he joined the "Serapion Brothers." After writing several stories like The Orchard, in the Tchekhov style, in 1925 Fedin published his novel, Cities and Years, in which he described pre-war Germany, his internment and the first years of the Russian Revolution. This novel at once gave him a reputation, which was confirmed by his later stories, Transvaal, The Old Man, and his second important novel, The Brothers (1928), which treats of the tribulations of the Russian intelligentsia on a background of Revolution. In 1933 Fedin began publishing another novel, The Rape of Europe, in which he discusses Western European life and problems. For reasons of health, he is a frequent visitor to Europe and is regarded as the "westerner" of Soviet literature. He belongs to the Leningrad circle of writers.

LOVE AND WAR

WHEN the Moscow envoy Shering, commander of the river flotilla, appointed Rodion Chorbov commissar of the flagship, nobody was surprised: Rodion was a pilot, a Bolshevik, a good enough fellow, so why shouldn't he become a commissar? Corporals commanded divisions, postmen directed finances, metal-joiners and tailors promulgated laws, and the army, the banks and the jurisprudence were all extraordinary, but not so bad—the Revolution was satisfied with them, and they gradually overcame all obstacles in its way.

The flagship was a simple tug-steamer, by Sormov's efforts transformed into a frowning, floating fortress, with turbid-green

gun-barrels and the blunt look of armoured turrets—at once unwieldy and uncomfortable. The fortress moved along the corridor of the beetle-browed Kama banks, and in its wake and ahead steamed similar tugs, and on their decks, under a canopy of sailors' drying linen, scowled the guns. The front was rolling back to the east, and Shering's flotilla was steaming eastwards.

Rodion met Shering in sight of the crew, in the stern of the steamer, when he had clambered up the trap-ladder from the boat, and it was apparent that Shering had descended from the deck on purpose to meet the new commissar. Shering strode up to the side of the steamer, leant over, held out his hand, and Rodion, clambering up the trap-ladder, gripped it firmly and trustfully and jumped aboard. Shering, without letting his hand go, motioned him a little to the side and, looking steadily and warmly in his face, said:

"You haven't changed. How are you?"

He drew Rodion towards him, put his arm round him and, so—with their arms round each other—they went on deck.

Rodion, in reality, had not changed: a big round head, set on his shoulders like a mooring-post on a quay; the deeply dented corners of firm lips; clear eyes under hillocks of eyebrows. For all the complexity he had learnt whilst working on board ships, there was still a trace in him of the bashful, boyish awkwardness of a beginner. Striding on deck by Shering's side, Rodion tried to pick his steps, but failed to match his comrade's precise stride and kept rudely shouldering him. When about to enter the deck cabin, at the very door, he had to pull Shering closely towards him to avoid losing his balance. In that instant he became strangely confused, and it suddenly flashed on him that his awkward gait and all the bottling-up of his movements were the outcome of a simple-hearted, youthful vitality, which could not be repressed. It was as if something had set him in motion.

"What a story!" he said hurriedly. "I've been waiting for this, waiting to meet you. For you to be the chief, and myself your assistant!"

A sky-blue, merry exultation shone in his eyes. Shering smiled affectionately, opened the door and wished to push him into the cabin, but Rodion stood back and entered last. . . .

Two dreams recurred most frequently to Rodion.

The first: he clammers over some sort of stakes, boards, and ladders aboard a marvellous ship. He hears a rising clang of iron on iron, as if he were enclosed in a boiler and a deaf man beside him were hammering away at an obstinate bolt. The steel rungs Rodion has to ascend are awkward. He grips a slender baluster, it snaps, he falls, but manages to catch hold of something and clammers to the top again. Of a sudden the rungs vanish, he remains suspended in the air and has to fly. He flaps his arms, like a bird's wings, and easily, almost imponderably, he soars. And beneath him he beholds the vast body of a ship swarming with minute men, scurrying in all directions like ants.

He feels the yielding density of the air and the sweet joy of cleaving it with the wide sweep of his arms. He beholds, from above, dozens of docks, and in each of them ships. The people become indistinct. Then the ships vanish, the docks vanish, the air turns white, somebody clasps Rodion above the waist within a ring of slender hands, and he contentedly says:

"It badly needs repairing," and hears a strange, impatient frosty breathing in his ear.

"You've time," says Shering, "drive faster."

But this is already the second dream, merging with the first and continuing it, as evening continues twilight.

Rodion drives the horse into infinity, the snowy wilderness shows a dark lilac. Shering painfully grips his chest. Rodion finds it impossible to breathe, he goes icy, and the terrible fear of freezing before his time, before it will suit Shering, holds him all numb, in the sledge.

"It's time now, good-bye," Shering says calmly and pushes Rodion off the sledge into the snow.

Rodion lies in the frosty lilac wilderness and tries to smile, but his lips have gone hard and his jaws are set like pincers. People crowd round him, staring spitefully into his eyes and shouting in rage and fear:

"Where is Shering? Answer! What have you done with Shering?"

Then Rodion slowly and reluctantly filters through his teeth:

"Is it my business, then, to look after Shering?"

"Am I my brother's keeper?" mumbles the red-bearded priest, fingering the silver cross hanging on his chest.

But no, this is no dream! This really happened some ten years ago, when Shering escaped from Siberia and joined his father in America. When questioned in his turn, as were all the political exiles and settlers, Rodion Chorbov shrugged his shoulders and, suppressing the wave of stinging cold within him, unwillingly pronounced:

"Is it my business to look after Shering?"

And at that moment he remembered his red-bearded school priest intoning in a uniform lulling tenor from the Old Testament:

"And the Lord said unto Cain: where is Abel, thy brother? And he answered: how should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?"

Rodion's act had nothing in common with Cain's, and the unexpected reminiscence struck him as stupid; and he smiled a scarcely perceptible twisted smile. It was that smile, perhaps, that cost him a year's imprisonment while the investigations into Shering's escape continued. But Rodion did not once regret the exile's wooden hut which he had exchanged for a convict's stone cage. He was proud of having been more useful to Shering, of having known more than others about the escape, and his silence when confronting the detectives bordered on enjoyment.

It was a brilliant get-away, and the whole exile colony talked of nothing else. Shering had once more demonstrated that he could act as well as read and write books, and Rodion had helped him in his last mad and splendid feat. Could he expect any recompense for himself? If Shering's deliverance had necessitated his freezing to death, as Rodion had frozen in his dream, if, by his death, the pursuit of the runaway could have been thwarted or even delayed for an hour, would Rodion Chorbov not have sacrificed his life with a feeling of finally found happiness?

Oh, yes! For Shering's sake—yes! Two lives, ten lives! He was ready to be born and born again that he might die and die afresh to save the only unique—irreplaceable, so it seemed to him—life of Shering. Of Shering, the leader of the Presna rebellion; of Shering, the promoter of conspiracies; of Shering, the master revolutionary, the savant, the agitator, the dauntless

and irreproachable Shering. O, how many model qualities were appended to that name, to that man! . . .

And behold, ten years after he had last shaken his hand, Rodion was sitting face to face with him in the deck-cabin.

Shering tapped Rodion's steep, broad knee and very concisely, without haste, sparing his words, outlined his plan for taking the White Army in the rear with his flotilla and of breaking through the enemy front.

To follow Shering's thought attentively, one had to keep all one's wits about one and one had to prevent oneself from looking at him, from falling into admiration of his face, which was a trifle sallow, and lean, with mobile brows and a slender, hooked nose; and from sifting countless reminiscences of one's old imagined conceptions of what the meeting with Shering would be like, with this Shering, whose slightly warm hand was now resting on Rodion's knee.

So Rodion frowned savagely at the floor, and the bumps on his forehead bulged like two nuts that might have been shifting from place to place under his skin.

"Do you understand my idea?" Shering questioned, finishing his exposition.

"I understand," Rodion replied.

"You looked tired? Or, perhaps, you don't agree with me?"

"I agree all right. I was trying not to miss anything."

Pressing the button of the bell on the table, Shering smiled once again, and Rodion felt himself flooded with suffusing tranquillity. He found Shering very much as he would have liked to find him, such as he frequently figured in reminiscences or dreams.

A woman entered the cabin. Her black dress was unusual—such dresses had not been worn for a long time—with a high closed neck, and long sleeves. But it fitted perfectly, and it almost looked as if its old-fashioned lines had been deliberately preserved. The woman swept Rodion with a glance and, seating herself deliberately and efficiently at the table and pulling the typewriter towards her, said rapidly:

"Good day, Comrade Chorbov."

"I see they know me already," Rodion decided.

"Take this down," said Shering quietly, and began dictating.

The woman held herself upright and her face, if anything, showed an excessive concentration, but she did her work easily, her strong fingers unhesitatingly found the right keys, and her lines rapidly caught up with the measured, monotonous dictation.

Suddenly, during a pause, she raised her eyes and her glance stumbled on Rodion's. She looked at him as one might look, meditatively, into space, but Rodion had the unpleasant sensation that she was observing him and was fixing him on purpose with her dark, immovable eyes. He frowned, turned his head aside, and decided not to give way.

"Next," said Shering.

But Rodion had, of course, made a mistake. The woman detached her glance from him as one detaches it from space: her eyelids quivered, her pupils swept to the side and her eyes, flooding with consciousness, immediately drooped, obscured by the bluish shadow of her eyebrows.

It then became evident that the woman's glance, while it remained open, illumined her whole face, and Rodion discerned behind her business-like concentration an easy, disturbing beauty. And he gazed on that face, uninterruptedly, as if the combat of glances were still waging.

"That's all," Shering finished, raising his voice slightly. "And how's the work I gave you this morning?" he asked immediately afterwards.

Standing already in the doorway of the cabin, the woman turned her head towards Shering, but her eyes once more rested on Rodion.

"I've only the correction left to do," she replied. "I shall bring it to you in half an hour."

No, she was again staring into space, she did not notice Rodion. A momentary flash of teeth helped her eyes to illumine her face, and, stooping in the doorway, the woman went out.

Rodion looked at her as she stepped over the threshold. She was strongly-built, her rounded shoulders and back were flexible, her dress displayed her body to advantage.

"Have I got everything right?" asked Shering, handing Rodion a piece of paper. "You'll have to sign it."

Rodion flushed and knit his brows. For the sake of a skirt he had almost let slip Shering's words. A good beginning that!

"I'll give it another glance," he mumbled, and discontentedly shook his head at the door,

"Who's that?"

"A typist, as you see. A secretary, accountant, anything you like."

"Has she been long with you?"

"About four months. An excellent worker."

Rodion became silent.

"Do you know her?" asked Shering.

"And you?" retorted Rodion, raising his bushy eyebrows.

"She worked for me in Moscow, and I brought her along with me. She comes of a merchant family, I believe. Varvara Michailovna Sherstobitova. Is that familiar?"

"A secretary of merchant family in the commander's staff!" Rodion blinked.

Shering did not reply at once. He looked attentively at his comrade, as if he had only just found the time to compare him with the Rodion whom he had known many years ago.

"You ought to know, perhaps," Shering smiled, "there's a certain Chuprikov on this boat, he's a sort of arsenal superintendent; you'll see him. When I invited Sherstobitova to come with me, she begged me very much to take him as well. I've just remembered. This same Chuprikov served as a volunteer in the regiment I formed. And it was he who then introduced Sherstobitova to the staff. So it turns out to be "an all-round guarantee." Shering laughed. "I don't know what they have in common."

Rodion remained silent.

"But if you're thinking . . ." Shering pronounced, setting his warm hand on Rodion's knee, "if you're thinking about . . . do I understand you rightly? Then, reassure yourself, there's no escaping over water on foot; life's as confined here as the palm of a hand. I had that in view, and I'm absolutely comfortable on that score. And Varvara Michailovna is a useful worker."

Shering rose from the bunk and walked up to the table.

"Yes, you yourself will become convinced of it," he added sharply. "You will have to work with her continually. . . . But let's get on. Now look over this. . . ."

Yes, Rodion had occasion to be convinced that Varvara Michailovna was an excellent worker. . . .

The conditions on board the river ships were very different from those on board seafaring ships. Along the Volga, Oka, and Kama float what are really habitable houses—sometimes large and spacious, sometimes confined, varying with the ship. The crew lives on the ship in whole families; especially the higher grades, the captain, the officers, the mechanics, the pilot, and sometimes the sailors, with their wives and babies, surrounded with the odour of domesticity, swaddling-cloth, bundles of linen and samovars. This domesticity had come on board the steamer from the rafts, roomy barges, and gaudy punts, and neither the comfortable express services nor the calculating shareholders of the shipping companies could undermine it. Sailors had grown accustomed to living and not only voyaging on board, and the sight of a woman's skirt on board had become for them something in the nature of a signal pointing to complete felicity.

During the War, these noisy tug-steamers were transformed into battleships, and the wives, the babies in swaddling clothes, and the samovars were set ashore. But the crew had not yet forgotten their accustomed habits, consecrated by the ages, and on board the flagship Varvara Michailovna had all the air of having been accidentally left over from the past.

The sailors of the old fleet, tried seadogs all of them, formed the fighting force of the flotilla. They had grown accustomed, during the Revolution, to dry land, and even more to the fact that events had entirely changed their aspect, that a radical change was being operated, and that there was no cause for being amazed at this. A river steamer to a seaman is a comic enough vessel, and a legitimate object of laughter; if only, for example, on occasions when the steamer passed through shallow water, and a drowsy sailor, standing at the prow, keeps dipping a bending pole into the water and monotonously calling out:

"Six and a half! . . . Eight and a half! . . ."

A vessel only fit for women! And what was there extraordinary in dishwashers scrubbing and rinsing the stew-pans in the kitchens of the flagship, or in the staff typist, Varvara Michailovna, strolling from time to time upon the deck? One could chatter in the evenings with the dishwashers, and exchange a joke with Varvara Michailovna, and watch her teeth gleam as she burst out laughing.

The sailors treated Varvara Michailovna well, Rodion remarked that at once. She held herself simply, and adapted herself to her surroundings.

But all these were trifling details, for the crew were preparing for more important things—for the imminent battle. They awaited this hour by hour, and the vessel became a machine, a concentrated will, leading the whole flotilla eastwards. Everything depended on their preparedness for the blow, for the operation they were engaged on; everything depended on their precision, on the faultless functioning of the minute parts of the machine.

And here Varvara Michailovna displayed absolutely irreplaceable qualities. Rodion understood this and admitted the justice of Shering's retort. She worked unwearyingly day and night, when there was work to do, and with an ease that made work a plaything. While engaged, she looked serious and even severe, but her robustness, which easily overcame any strain, made that seriousness and severity somehow comfortable and playful. She amused herself with, rather than worked over, the ship's orders and household reports; as she clattered away on her typewriter her face shone a joyous red, just as if she were sitting in a hammock on the prow of the ship and the wind were blowing in her cheeks.

In the end this unfailing ease began to irritate Rodion. It became absolutely apparent that Varvara Michailovna was pretending. She also must have found it terribly hard and trying to get up in the middle of the night, sit down and write to Shering's or Rodion's dictation. She must, too, have been on edge from this uninterrupted expectation of danger, from this expectation of battle, from the thought that the fleet might, perhaps, be advancing into an ambush, and that this ambush might be set in the most unexpected place, and that when Shering said in a low and weary voice: "Full stop, new paragraph!"—then in that second everything would go to blazes; Varvara Michailovna was, of course, keenly on edge, but she had her reasons for controlling her fatigue and fear—to convince him, Rodion, that she was stronger than he, than all of them. That was obvious! She was certainly trying to wound Rodion in some way or other, to force him to realize that she excelled him in firmness, steadiness, and education. Of course, of course!—in education!

That was her most unpleasant, repulsive, and irritating trait. Why, for example, did she sit, silent and passionless, gazing with her black arrested eyes into space, when Rodion, tripping up in his dictation, groped for a fitting word or simply didn't know how to begin his report? Varvara Michailovna held her fingers ready, breathed evenly and imperceptibly, her eyes grew vacant, yes, devil take it, vacant! But her lips, her lips! Her lips looked as if they might at any moment drop the word Rodion was searching for. But no, no; the word didn't come! And how should he find the word? How?

"Write!" Rodion says roughly. "Next. Hm-m . . ."

She is ready to write, absolutely ready; she has even raised her elbows, but how is he to find that word?

And if only a single syllable were to drop from her full, red, slightly quivering lips! If only she would complain, even once, of her fatigue!

Whence such self-control and such a feeling of superiority? What guided her, how explain her presence here, on board a warship? What was she doing at the front, on this side of the front, and not the other? Why had she come here?

Rodion Chorbov, commissar of the flagship, at last found a spare moment to broach a casual topic to the typist.

"M—m—m," he begins, "where did you get . . . this . . . where did you get this store of . . . what's its name . . . heroism?"

Varvara Michailovna twitches her eyebrow. She realizes that she is going to be distracted from her work, and is ready enough to comply, only—just a minute—she has another two or three lines to read over.

"Haven't you thought," Rodion continues, "that our steamer may crash . . . head on . . . on a mine, and we'd, all of us . . . you understand. . . ."

"Yes," Varvara Michailovna replies loudly, with a careless shake of her hand, and suddenly directing her eyes straight into Rodion's. "Yes, Comrade Chorbov. It's quite possible that our steamer may crash on a mine and that we'd . . . as you say. . . ."

He makes an indeterminate gesture, pointing to the cabin ceiling with his stretched finger, and it seems to Rodion that the powerful lamp is shining straight down into her eyes.

"M—m, yes . . ." he wishes to say, "that's how . . ."

But Varvara Michailovna had not yet finished:

"For even if you, Comrade Chorbov, are thinking of the mine on which our steamer is to crash, then so much the more——"

"What do you mean?" he interrupts her roughly. "Why—'even I'? What am I—some sort of a . . . what d'you call it?"

She does not cease looking at him, and the powerful lamp, lighting her face, glows with ever-increasing ardour and strength. . . .

"Yes," Rodion says, withdrawing. "We'll have to make out a report about that . . . about the state of our accounts. . . . Take a half-sheet— No, a sheet. A full sheet, unfolded."

His voice is like a commander's when he shouts "unfolded."

Sometimes Varvara Michailovna is peculiar. Rodion, by the way, feels now that he has been on board the flagship ever so long, that he has never been separated from Shering, and that he has had time to acquaint himself with Varvara Michailovna and all her artfulness. She seemed to be unveiling her mind, to be demonstrating that she has nothing to hide from Rodion and no reason to fear him, that her work really amuses her.

Rodion turns his round head from side to side; the bumps on his forehead vanish and reappear, as he dictates a résumé of the events of the day that has ended.

"'Unmooring from the village' . . . what's it called . . . 'Voskresensky. . . .'"

"Am I to write down 'what's it called,' too?" Varvara Michailovna asks imperturbably.

He looks at her. She keeps her eyes fixed on her typewriter.

"N—no," drawls Rodion menacingly. "N—no, dear Comrade, there is no need to write down words like 'What's its name.'"

And he changes his tone abruptly, continuing his important dictation:

"'Unmooring from the village Voskresensky, the flagship was attacked by an enemy band from the shore. . . .'"

Varvara Michailovna stops rattling on her "Underwood" and smiles.

"What's the matter?"

"You can't say that, Comrade Chorbov."

"What?"

"You can't say: 'Unmooring, the flagship was attacked.'"

"Write as you're told!" he yells. "I know you're more educated, but I haven't time for lessons now!"

She goes on writing, without uttering a sound; she goes on writing, day after day, like a painted automaton, taking no notice of Rodion, taking absolutely no notice of him, so that it becomes even . . . offensive.

And then, devil take it! two days later Rodion discovers that all the reports dictated by him, while preserving his thought exactly, show scarcely perceptible corrections. No, that was intolerable; that was overstepping all limits; that was . . .

"Listen, you," Rodion filters through his compressed lips. "What's its name . . . you'd better stop this."

"What?"

"Doing all this in your own way."

Varvara Michailovna looked terribly frightened. One could not have believed she would be so frightened.

"Have I got something wrong?"

"No. But you set it down in different words and in another order. . . . Not as I said. . . ."

"Better, or worse?"

Varvara Michailovna was frightened, that was obvious and unpleasant. She had done nothing criminal, after all, so why punish her? But Rodion was not to be deceived. He had clearly remarked behind the fright that same superior smile which confused and repulsed him.

"Perhaps even better," he said sarcastically. "But why give yourself the trouble?"

Aha, a good shot! Varvara Michailovna saw that her artfulness had been laid bare, and became frank for a change. She approached her face a trifle nearer to Rodion's, giving him to understand that, if he wished, they might be good friends, and, openly, without any concealment or artfulness, laughed.

"Dear Comrade Chorbov, it's no trouble whatsoever. I make them as a matter of course when taking down dictation. . . ."

There it was. He knew very well that she would not let slip the chance of stressing her talents, so as to humble him and underline once more her superiority.

"I have told you already to keep your education to yourself. And if it won't leave you in peace, then . . ."

Rodion was beside himself. He was furious. He must, once and for all, put this young lady in her place, by declaring that nothing could be hidden from a commissar; that he knew everything. And, breathing hard, he continued:

"You can . . . what's its name . . . give lessons of grammar . . . to the assistant-arsenal-superintendent, Chuprikov . . . in the evenings . . . in the stern. . ."

But Varvara Michailovna simply deafened Rodion with a burst of laughter, and he stood a second, looking bewildered. What was the matter with her? Was she right in the head? She assumed, perhaps, that the commissar of the flagship disapproved of her stupid meetings with Chuprikov? What next! As if he ever thought of Chuprikov! Still, it was not a bad idea to watch him. He was a bit over-prompt and ready.

But where had Rodion heard such deep-chested laughter? Where had he seen, exactly, such gleaming bars of teeth? Devil knows what rubbish was filling his head all this time, when, at any moment, decisive, far-reaching, and wonderful events might take place!

Rodion, doubtless, would have been able to dismiss all this from his mind if it had not for the accident with the oil-tanker, which had startled him so much that it made the importunate reminiscence a living reality.

They met the tanker unexpectedly. Strange, that it had survived the retreat of the White armies; that it had not been burnt by the foraging bands of Greens. It stood isolated, in a deserted spot, but its mooring and anchors were in order, just as if the crew had abandoned it for an hour or so and might be coming back at any moment. They approached the tanker cautiously at first, in boats; looked over it, found a goodly supply of oil, and decided to replenish their supply. The flagship was the last to fuel.

The pumping gear and apparatus had been damaged, and the crew were a long time fixing them. They soiled themselves and tore their clothes in the process, but got what they wanted. To celebrate, while the snorting pump spat its black stream of oil, the sailors started carousing in the bows. One of them amused the crew with a sham wrestling match. He actually

gripped himself, circus-fashion, by the neck, flung himself down on all fours, bent and twisted his shoulders under his head, rolled himself over on his back, leapt up again and then threw himself to the ground again. He ended by tumbling on to a cable that had been rolled up in a ring, and standing on his head in the middle of it, so that his feet stuck up in the air as if he were in a tub. The crew roared with laughter.

Rodion, who found himself in the bows with the sailors, noticed how they kept raising their eyes towards the deck, and, as if encouraged, continued laughing still more loudly. He glanced up.

Varvara Michailovna stood on deck by Shering's side, leaning on a rail and looking down at Rodion. He saw that Shering was laughing, and thought how good it was that the commander of the flotilla was joining in the sailors' amusements; but it was not his laughter that drew his attention and gathered all his strength as if in a single handful.

In the blazing light of day Varvara Michailovna's eyes and brows appeared still darker, and the bars of her pointed teeth still more dazzling. Her deep, soft laughter rose distinctly above the thundering roar of masculine throats, and her whole appearance at that moment on the steamer, somewhere in a blue sky high above Rodion's head (above her Rodion only saw the sky), struck him as so improbable and far-fetched that he immediately remembered her, yes, her, as a young girl in a dress white as a captain's uniform, leaning over a deck-rail, above Rodion's head, exactly as at that moment. It was she—yes, yes!—it was she who had laughed at Rodion that time when, booby that he was, he had cast the mooring-rope short of the wharf. It was she, and none other!

So that was the origin of his worrying hostility towards her self-confident manner, her deportment, and her deliberate, coldly contemptuous speech! So that was the origin of the hatred—oh, how fiercely he hated Varvara Michailovna! So that was the origin of his hatred of her strong fingers, of her looks, of her unbearably dazzling mouth, of her back—no, he could think without fury of her back—as she used to go out of the door with her shoulder-blades slightly contracted. Ah, ah, ah! So that was the origin of the unreasonable, restless pain that had surprised Rodion even then, many years ago.

He recalled now their encounter, even to that last moment, when the giddy girl had nodded to him from a cab and he had thrown a word or two after her, as a viaticum. A pity he had not shouted a little more forcibly, so that she might have heard unmistakably, so that the words might have publicly branded her. For how dared she laugh at him then, and how dared she now, how dared she! Rodion had long ago forgotten the cruel slight of the encounter and the irritating, gnawing pain, and here it was again. Ah, ah, ah! Would that the hour would come which Rodion had waited so long for, so that he might stop thinking of everything, stop desiring anything, except the principal, the unique, and the for-ever-decisive!

That hour came soon. It came that very night.

The leading ship of the flotilla struck a mine and went to the bottom. The explosion was heard on the flagship.

Awaiting orders, the flotilla stopped.

At dawn, a motor-cutter and a landing-detachment went to reconnoitre.

The enemy were in full retreat. They were beginning to retire, and fire was the only link that joined them to the Reds, for they were burning everything in their path.

The current swept along with it the black, charred skeletons of vessels. They conglomerated on the sand-banks, and the wind whistled endless songs through their iron ribs. In places, the vessels drifted together in dozens—three-decked steamers, landing-stages, steam-tugs, and tankers—having all the appearance of a burnt-out city in the water. In the night, barges floated by, blazing like torches. They cut into the twisted and sooty city, lighting up the iron ribs of the vessels, showered flaming brands around them and whirlwinds of blood-red sparks, then crumbled to pieces, and, hissing and crackling, died in the waters.

And down the river moved fresh floating torches, or sunken, smoking bonfires, or carbonised skeletons—whole caravans of charred corpses, silent and inaudible in the steady noise of the skirting forests.

Sometimes the current would sweep one of the charred vessels off the sand-bank, but no sooner did it move than it struck a mine, and its fragments were rapidly engulfed in the waters. At sharp bends of the river barricades of beams and

chains blocked its course and caught up fragments of vessels till the barricades grew from bank to bank, blocking the way.

All this commotion seemed to be happening independently of men. Fires burnt themselves out and died, fragments flew into the air; caravans of charred ships drifted and swirled; barricades formed and fell away—the river was managing its own affairs.

Finally, a deadly ribbon of fire floated out from a tributary, spreading over the whole width of the river. The water gleamed, spreading over the whole width of the river. The water flamed with a fiery layer of petrol which glowed smoky blue in the sun and purple at night.

The flotilla was ordered to retreat.

The flagship allowed the last ship to pass it, and then followed. The ships were ready for battle, but they could only withstand water, not fire; and sacrifice would have been aimless now since victory in any case had been assured. The flaming river behind the ship was the signal of that victory.

Then, of a sudden, the ambush which they had been expecting was revealed: the enemy had cut off their retreat. It was quite possible that the ambush was a simple accident: some bands of routed Whites might, in their despair, have decided to tempt their fortune and spend their remaining shells on the enemy ships. But nobody on board could guess the extent of the attacking forces nor the enemy's plans. They simply made ready for battle, and, certain of its imminence, welcomed the first shot.

It rang out from behind a mound, at a bend of the river, while the ships were steaming between open banks. There was nothing to be seen. Blue puffs of smoke rose regularly behind the mound, not very frequently, always in the same place, and lazily vanishing. There was only one gun in action, and it was trying to drop a barrage across the river, the shells falling first of all on the right bank, then on the left, and then beginning to explode in the water. All the ships, with the exception of the flagship, passed through the barrage unharmed, and, forming up behind the bend, began replying.

Shering observed the battle from the bridge, which was to the left of the ship. The captain stood on the right. All was as usual, in everyday order. The bearded pilot was peering with knitted brows through the windows of his cabin; the sailor

at the prow kept plunging his pole into the water (they were going slowly, sounding for depth); Varvara Michailovna, looking like a first-class passenger, emerged from the saloon, and Rodion Chorbov, the ship's commissar, after inspecting the gun-crews, halted not far from the bridge.

But, suddenly, the ship gave a long-drawn-out shudder, just as if it had run full speed on a sand-bank. The left-hand bridge tilted up strangely on one side, and a deafening, whizzing bang threw up a crest of bright, foaming spray on deck.

The bridge was half torn away, a brightly polished speaking-tube jutting out in solitary glory, and the rails bent. Shering was not on the bridge.

An unbroken silence reigned for an instant on deck. Then Rodion tore himself from his place, dashed up to the telephone, and pulled over the signal-lever.

"Stop!" he yelled down the tube, pressing his mouth firmly to the mouthpiece, almost leaning on its burning brass, and at the same time tearing off his jacket.

"Reverse engines!"

"Go slow!"

He tore himself away from the telephone and threw his jacket on the ground. A hollow answer came back from the speaking-trumpet:

"Right you are."

Rodion stepped over the bent rails of the bridge, paused on the edge, planted his feet firmly on the gunwale, crossed himself, and plunged into the water, with his joined hands held out straight in front of him.

Varvara Michailovna ran to the edge of the bridge. She gripped the rail, knitted her brows, and strained her eyes at the smooth surface of the river. She was pale and was biting her lips. She clutched at the twisted rails and beat on them with her fists. Fiercely she glanced at the deck. The crew were doing nothing! She was growing paler and paler. The dazzlingly fresh colours of her face had vanished. By an effort of will she checked a cry.

Rodion's head appeared above the water. She saw him take two deep breaths and again disappear.

"The boat! Lower the boat!" Varvara Michailovna shouted piercingly, searching for the captain with her eyes.

But the captain was already at his post, and the sailors were already rattling away at the pulleys in the stern. The boat plumped heavily on the water, and Rodion's round shiny head once more slowly rose to the surface, not far from the stern.

Rodion lay on his back, with his eyes shut and his mouth wide open, and suddenly Shering's white face appeared on his chest. Rodion held Shering, gripping his black hair in his fist and lying almost motionless beneath him in the water.

When Shering was brought back to consciousness on the steamer, and it was realized that he was unharmed, Varvara Michailovna went up to Rodion. He looked almost thinner; rivulets of water were pouring from him and his awkwardness became more pronounced and comic.

His face twitched as from some unexpected pain, and the pain discomforted him: he failed to understand it. Varvara Michailovna gazed at him in amazement and apprehension. Noticing her eyes, that were as novel and frightening as the grimace contorting his face, Rodion turned aside to the sailors.

"It's a swindle," he said, "it isn't even a real battle. They've shut up; choked themselves."

He shook his head at the spot whence the shots had come. All was quiet there. . . .

That day Varvara Michailovna heard, as she was sauntering on deck, an unusual commotion in the crew's quarters. She went down to investigate.

Sailors were crowding round the store-room. Somebody was beseeching pitifully; somebody else was indistinctly shouting abuse. The sailors were talking all together, and were pushing to get a look at something near the store-room door. They made way for Varvara Michailovna coldly and disobligingly.

She saw Chuprikov. He was on his knees before Rodion, on the threshold of the store-room, and by his side was a small sack, out of which sugar was pouring on the floor.

"God's truth!" Chuprikov was saying, "there was no more room. You can see yourself. The store-room's packed full; there isn't room for a bag of rice, to say nothing of this! Do you think I'd dare to violate national property, Comrade Chorbov? My hand would wither before I'd . . ."

Rodion was looking hard at Chuprikov and wagging his head as if meditating. His hand gripped a revolver.

"Comrade Chorbov!" Varvara Michailovna suddenly called out. "Comrade Shering wants to see you."

She dropped her eyes and went away. They made way for her. Behind her she heard Rodion's heavy step. On deck, when Rodion was nearing Shering's cabin, Varvara Michailovna said:

"No, no! Come to my cabin."

Rodion entered her cabin and looked round him.

"You deceived me?" he asked dully.

"Yes."

He looked at her in silence. Again she appeared unrecognizable; as in the morning, in the stern, there was not a sign of that revolting superiority about her. She was about to plead, to beg something. He laughed:

"Well?"

"I want to ask you . . . not to touch this . . . Chuprikov. . . . That is, not to punish him . . . too severely. . . ."

"What is he to you?"

"Nothing," she said, smiling. "But I am obliged to him. . . ."

"How?" Rodion hurried.

"And if only by . . . finding myself now beside you."

Ah, she was again beginning her game; she was still confident of her fascination, she . . .

"Chuprikov's—a thief," Rodion said cuttingly.

"He's pitiful and stupid."

"He's not so stupid."

"Listen. If you put Chuprikov under arrest . . ." Varvara Michailovna began in a deep and low voice, going up to Rodion. But he interrupted her.

"Don't meddle in my affairs!"

"I beg you . . ."

"What do you mean . . . what's its name . . . why beg? Will you answer for him?"

Rodion punctuated these last words, and looked challengingly through his narrowed eyes at Varvara Michailovna.

"Yes, I'll answer for him," she said simply.

"And who will answer to me for yourself?" asked Rodion, with a triumphant smile and a suggestive spacing of his words.

She had, of course, nothing to say! She understood her

helplessness. She had only one way left: to rely on her usual and unique weapon; to show Rodion the fire of her dark eyes, the fresh, healthy flush of her cheeks, the gleam of her parted lips, and the motion of her strong, rounded shoulders. Of course! So she bent forward towards Rodion till her hair nearly touched him, till he could feel the disturbing warmth of her face, so that she might pronounce close against his lips the absurd, unexpectedly gentle words:

"You yourself will answer for me!"

Ah, ah! How Rodion hated her in that instant! With what delight he would have crushed her, wrenched and destroyed her smile, so that never again in this life would he have to behold that mouth, those eyes. Ah, ah!

"What the devil!" he muttered.

His hands twitched undecidedly. The grimace, which had made its first appearance that morning, once more contorted his face painfully and hideously, and he forgot what he wished to say.

"My poor dear." Again he heard the soft voice, and strained fiercely to regain his speech:

"What's its name . . . I say . . . once and for all . . ."

"Darling, sweetheart!" somebody whispered in his ear. "We talk all the time of things we don't really want, don't really need. . . ."

"But it's you! You who talk of such things!" Rodion almost shouted. But he had stepped over something; he had seized somebody's strong body, and—at last, at last!—was giving free reign to his unappeased ferocity, to his hatred, and to his mortal madness.

From *The Brothers*. Oct. 1926–March 1928.

ISAAC BABEL

(*For biographical note see p. 137*)

THE AWAKENING

ALL the men of our circle: brokers, shopkeepers, employees of banks and shipping companies, had their children taught music. It was a perfect mania. Our fathers in their impotent hankering after success had invented a lottery. And they took as their stake the bones of the little men. Odessa had been afflicted with this craze more than other cities. As a matter of fact, in the course of a dozen years, our city had supplied the concert halls of the entire world with infant prodigies. Mischa Elman, Zimbalist, Gabrilovitch, they all came from Odessa; and it was with us that Jascha Heifetz made his début.

As soon as a boy reached the age of four or five his mother would take this miniscule and puny being to see Zagoursky. Zagoursky had started a factory of infant prodigies, a factory of Jew-dwarfs in lace collars and patent shoes. He routed them out of the lower-class quarters of the Moldavanka, out of the rank yards of the Old Market. Zagoursky inculcated the first elements, then children went to Professor Auer in Petersburg. A powerful harmony vibrated in the souls of these abortions with blue, puffed craniums. Many of them have become famous virtuosos! And so my father decided to do as much for me. Though I had already outstripped the age of infant prodigies—I was almost fourteen—so small and delicate was I that I might easily have passed for eight years of age. And there lay all our hope.

I was taken to see Zagoursky. Out of respect for my grandfather, he agreed to charge the small sum of a rouble a lesson. My grandfather, Levvi-Itskhok, was the laughing-stock and ornament of the town. Attired in a top hat and shabby pair of shoes, he used to meander through the streets and solve the knottiest problems. He was asked why the Jacobins had betrayed Robespierre, how artificial silk was manufactured, the nature of a goblin, and the meaning of a Cæsarean operation. My ancestor was equal to all these questions. Out of respect for his wisdom

and madness, Zagoursky charged us only a rouble a lesson. And it was only out of fear for my grandfather that he did take pains with me, for there was nothing to take pains over. The sounds that escaped from my violin grated like iron filings. I was the first to have my heart flayed by those sounds; my father, however, refused to desist from his idea. At home there was only thought of Mischa Elman, whom the Tsar in person had exempted from military service. According to my father's information, Zimbalist had been presented to the King of England and had played at Buckingham Palace; Gabrilovitch's parents had bought two mansions in Petersburg. The infant prodigies had brought fortune to their families. My father would have put up with poverty, but he hankered after glory.

"It's impossible," his guests whispered in his ear. "It's impossible that the grandchild of such a grandfather . . ."

I, however, had other ideas. Whilst practising I used to place a volume of Dumas or Turgenev on the music stand, and at the same time as scraping God knows what, I devoured page after page. In the daytime I used to tell the urchins of the quarter fanciful stories which I had set down in writing during the night. Authorship was hereditary in our family. Levvitskhok, who lost his reason in his old age, had spent his whole life writing a story entitled "The Headless Man." I continued the tradition.

Three times a week I used to drag myself, burdened with my violin-case and music books, to Witte Street, formerly the Street of the Nobles, where Zagoursky had his apartment. There, lined up along the walls, stood inflammable and hysterical little Jewish girls waiting their turn. To their feeble knees they hugged violins of a size much more imposing than that of their owners who were destined to play in Buckingham Palace.

The door of the sanctuary would open. Big-headed, freckled children would come staggering out of Zagoursky's study; they had necks as slender as flower-stalks and the purple-hued cheeks of epileptics. The door would shut again, swallowing a fresh gnome. Behind the partition the professor in a flowing tie, with reddish locks and skipping legs, fussed, sang, and directed. Promoter of a monstrous lottery, he was subject to fits of inspiration and peopled the Moldavanka and the blind alleys

of the Old Market with the ghosts of pizzicatas and cantilenas. These airs, later on, in the hands of old Professor Auer, acquired a diabolical sparkle.

I felt out of place in the midst of this sect. A dwarf among other dwarfs, I heard another note in the voice of my ancestors.

I had some difficulty in taking the initial step. One day I left home with my violin case, music, and a dozen roubles; the monthly amount of my lessons. I went down the Nejinskaya Street; to reach Zagoursky's I ought to have turned into the Street of the Nobles; instead, I mounted the Tirapolskaya and found myself at the seashore. I spent my leisure hours in the port. This was the first step of my liberation. Zagoursky's waiting-room did not see me again. More serious problems now became the unique object of my preoccupations. My comrade, Nemanov, and I had fallen into the habit of going on board the steamer *Kensington* to visit an old sailor, Mr. Trottiburn. Nemanov was my junior by twelve months; and yet, ever since the age of eight, he had devoted himself to a most ingenious trade. He had a genius for business and has realized his promise. He is now a New York millionaire and the director of General Motors, a company as powerful as Ford's. Nemanov suffered me as his follower because I obeyed him implicitly. He used to buy contraband pipes from Mr. Trottiburn. These pipes were made in Lincoln by the old sailor's brother.

"Gentlemen," Mr. Trottiburn addressed us, "remember my words: every man ought to fashion himself the things that are dear to him. . . . To smoke a ready-made pipe is as bad as sucking an enema. . . . Have you heard of Benvenuto Cellini? . . . He was a craftsman, a master. My brother, who lives at Lincoln, could tell you the story of Cellini. My brother minds his own business. He has only one conviction, and that is that every man ought to fashion himself the things that are dear to him and not leave their care to others. . . . How can we not share his opinion, gentlemen? . . ."

Nemanov sold Trottiburn's pipes to bank directors, foreign consuls, and rich Greeks. He made a hundred per cent. profit.

The pipes of the Lincoln craftsman had a breath of poetry about them. There was in each of them an idea, a drop of eternity. Their stems glowed yellow; their cases were lined with satin. I used to try and imagine the life that Matthew

Trotturn, the last of the pipe artists and rebel against the normal course of things, led in old England.

"Impossible, gentlemen, to refute the fact that every man ought to fashion himself the things he holds dear. . . ."

The heavy waves by the jetty bore me farther and farther away from my home, pregnant with the odour of onion and Jewish destiny. I left the port and took up my stand beyond the jetty. There the urchins of Primorskaya Street spent their days on a tiny bank of sand. From morning till night they strolled about trouserless, diving under the pinnacles and stealing coconuts for their dinner in expectation of better days when the barges of Kerson and Kamenka would appear, loaded with water-melons, which could be burst open against the mooring-posts.

I was obsessed by the dream of swimming. I was ashamed to confess to those bronzed children that, born in Odessa, I had not seen the sea until the age of ten and that at fourteen I did not know how to swim.

It was late in life to learn such an essential thing. My childhood had been spent studying the Hemara and I had lived the life of a sage. But once grown up, I began climbing trees.

The science of swimming proved unattainable to me. The hydrophobia of all my ancestors, Spanish rabbis and Frankfurt money-changers, dragged me to the bottom of the sea. The water did not bear me up in the least. Completely exhausted and soaked in salt water, I used to stagger out of the water towards my violin and music. I had become welded to the instruments of my crime and always lugged them about with me. The contest between the rabbis and the sea continued until the moment when the local Neptune, Efim Nikititch Smolitch, a proof-reader of the *Odessa News*, took pity on me. The latter's athletic chest simulated a feeling of pity for Jewish children. Nikititch reigned over crowds of rachitic abortions. He picked them up in the Moldavanka hovels, conducted them to the seashore, dug them into the sand, made them do gymnastic exercises, dived with them, taught them songs, and, whilst grilling in the perpendicular rays of the sun, told them stories of fishes and animals. To grown-ups Nikititch would explain that he was a nature philosopher. Listening to his talk, the Jewish urchins would burst their sides with laughing, they

fretted and became as importunate as fledgelings. And the sun sprinkled them with fugitive lizard-like stains.

The old man had, from the corner of his eye and without a word, observed my duel with the waves. As soon as he understood that there was no hope left and that I would never learn to swim, he took me entirely to heart. His gay heart, free of all ambition, of all covetousness, of all anguish, belonged to us in its entirety. . . . This man with his copper-coloured shoulders, with his bronzed and slightly bandy legs, and head that made one think of an ageing gladiator, used to lie there, on the sands beyond the jetty, as might a sovereign of those waters, consecrated to petrol and water-melons, in the midst of us others, the ultimate residues of a tribe which has not learnt how to die.

For Nikititch I felt a love such as only a boy subject to pains in the head and hysteria might feel for an athlete. I did not leave his side for an instant and was on the look-out ready to do the slightest service for him.

He said to me:

"Don't fluster yourself. Strengthen your nerves. Swimming will come later, of its own. . . . What's that story of yours about the water not bearing you up? And why should it not bear you up?"

Nikititch, observing my efforts, made an exception in my favour. He invited me to his attic. It was large and tidy and covered over with matting, and he showed me his dog, his pigeons, his hedgehog, and his tortoise. In return for these treasures I brought him a tragedy which I had written.

"I suspected you of scribbling," said Nikititch. "One can see it in your eyes. . . . For the most part you don't look at anything."

He read my manuscript, shrugged his shoulders, passed his hand over his grey, thick locks, and paced the attic.

"Must believe," he said, drawling his syllables and with a pause between each word, "that there's a divine spark in you. . . ."

We came out into the street. The old man stopped, struck the pavement violently with his cane and looked hard at me.

"What is it you lack? . . . Youth's not misfortune and will pass with age. . . . What you lack is a feeling for nature."

He pointed with his cane to a tree with a reddish trunk and low spreading foliage.

"What's the name of that tree?"

I had no idea.

"What grows on this shrub?"

I did not know either. We were crossing the Alexandrovsky Square. The old man pointed out all the trees with his stick, caught hold of my shoulder on the passage of a bird and forced me to listen to its call.

"What bird is that singing?"

I was incapable of replying. I knew nothing: neither the names of trees nor of birds, neither the countries to which these latter migrated nor their classifications, neither the point of the horizon where the sun rises nor the hour of greatest dew-fall.

"And you dare write? . . . A man who does not live in contact with nature is incapable of composing even a couple of lines of any value. Your landscapes remind one of the description of a stage setting. The devil take me, what were your parents dreaming of these fourteen years?"

What had they dreamt of? Of bank drafts, Mischa Elman's palatial mansions. . . . I did not tell this to Nikititch, but remained silent.

"A feeling for nature," I said to myself. "My God, why had I never thought of it? . . . Where could I find a man to explain to me the calls of birds and the names of trees? . . . What do I know about it? I can recognize lilac, and that only when in flower. Lilac and acacia. The Gretcheskaya and Deribas Streets are planted with acacias."

During the meal my father told yet another story about Jascha Heifetz. On his way to see Robine, he had met Mendelssohn, Jascha's uncle. Just think, the boy earns eight hundred roubles a night. Calculate how much that would make at the rate of fifteen concerts a month.

I calculated: twelve thousand roubles a month. As I was going through the multiplication and was carrying four, I glanced out of the window. Across the small concrete courtyard M. Zagoursky, my professor of music, advanced, majestically leaning on a cane; he wore a cloak which the wind ruffled gently; his reddish locks floated free of his soft felt hat. It could not be argued that he was seized with premature suspicions. Over three months had elapsed since the day I had deposited my violin on the sand by the jetty. . . .

Zagoursky approached the entrance door. I made a dash for the back door; but this, the day before, had been condemned as being unsafe from thieves. No escape. I shut myself in the lavatory. Half an hour later the entire family had congregated in front of the lavatory door. The women were weeping. My aunt Bobka rubbed her fat shoulders against the door-frame and sobbed scalding tears. My father preserved silence. Then he began speaking in a voice that was low and distinct as never before in his life:

"I am an officer," he said. "I have an estate. I hunt. The peasants pay me rent. I have placed my son in the cadet corps. I have no further trouble with my son. . . ."

He grew silent. The women blubbered. Then a terrific blow shook the lavatory door, my father was pounding it with his whole body and taking a run each time.

"I am an officer," he howled. "I hunt. . . . I'll kill him. . . . It's the end. . . ."

The hook gave way, the door was now held only by a slide-bolt fixed by a single nail. The women were rolling on the ground, screaming, clutching at my father's feet. Half-mad, he tore himself free. His mother, an old woman, hobbled up, attracted by the noise.

"My child," she said to him in Yiddish. "Great is our sorrow. It has no bounds. Only blood is lacking in our house. I do not wish to see blood in our house. . . ."

My father groaned. I heard him walk away with dragging step. The slide-bolt hung on a single nail.

I kept my fortress till the fall of night. When everybody had gone to bed my aunt Bobka led me off to my grandmother's. It was a long walk. The moonlight fell rigidly upon unknown shrubs and anonymous trees. An invisible bird whistled, then stopped or perhaps fell asleep. . . . What bird was it? What was it called? Does the dew fall in the evening? . . . Where is the constellation of the Great Bear? Where does the sun rise? . . .

We were skirting the Potchtovaya Street. Bobka gripped my hand tightly to prevent my running away. She was right. I was thinking of flight.

IURY OLESHA

Iury Olesha (b. 1894) received a secondary education. One of the most original and talented of the younger Soviet writers, his tale Envy (1927) revived a "hamletian" doubt in the epoch. This book resulted in a polemic and made Olesha popular. He has since adapted it to the stage as The Conspiracy of Sentiments. His collection of stories, The Cherry Stone, appeared in 1930; and he has written a number of other plays, The Catalogue of Benefits (1931), The Three Fat Men and The Confessions of Zande among them.

THE CHERRY STONE

ON Sunday I visited Natasha in the country. There were three other guests besides; two girls and Boris Michailovitch. The girls in the company of Natasha's brother went off boating on the river. We, that is, Natasha, Boris Michailovitch and myself, made for the wood. In the wood we found a sunlit clearing and lay down. Natasha raised her face and, of a sudden, I found myself gazing at a shiny porcelain saucer.

Natasha treats me as an equal, but she plays up to Boris Michailovitch as to an elder. She knows this makes me uncomfortable and envious of Boris Michailovitch, and so she keeps squeezing my hand and turning to me at every sentence with an interrogative:

"Isn't that so, Fedya?"

And she says this as if she were asking my pardon, in an oblique kind of way.

A droll voice of a bird resounded from a near-by thicket and set us talking of birds. I said that I had never in my life seen a thrush, for example, and asked: "What's a thrush like?"

A bird flew out of the thicket. It flew across the clearing and perched itself on a protruding branch close over our heads. It rested there on the swaying branch and blinked. And I thought that birds' eyes were ugly, with their strongly pronounced eyelids and no brows.

"What is it?" I questioned in a whisper. "A thrush? Is that a thrush?"

No answer. I have my back to them. My miser's look cannot follow them; they are enjoying their isolation. I am gazing at the bird. But, turning my head, I see Boris Michailovitch fondling Natasha's cheek. His hand is thinking, "Let the pretentious fellow watch his bird!" But I have no longer eyes for the bird, I am all ears: I catch the smack of a kiss. I do not turn my head, but I have caught them in the act all the same: they saw how I quivered.

"Is that a thrush?" I question.

The bird had vanished. It flew away, high through the tree-tops. It was no easy flight; it flew away brushing the leaves with its wings.

Natasha was treating us to cherries. Remembering my childhood, I left one of the cherry-stones in my mouth. It rolled round and round my mouth and was finally sucked clean and dry. I took it out then—it looked wooden.

When I left the country the cherry-stone was still in my mouth.

I journey through an invisible land.

And here I am, back in the city, strolling along. The sun is setting and my steps lead eastwards. I accomplish a double journey.

One of my journeys is worthy of general attention. A passer-by notices a man strolling along a deserted, overgrown lane. What is happening to this peacefully progressing man? He beholds his own shadow preceding him. This shadow moves on ahead of him, far ahead, with long, faint feet. I cut across a waste-ground, the shadow climbs a brick wall and, suddenly, loses its head. The passer-by does not notice this; I alone behold this. I enter a passage-way between two blocks of buildings. The buildings are terribly high and the passage-way is full of shade. The soil here is mouldy and yielding as in an orchard. A wild dog runs towards me, making an early detour. We, of course, gave each other a wide berth. I turned round. The entrance shines like a lamp in the distance. The dog is momentarily arrested by a projection at the entrance. But it manages to escape into the waste-ground, and only then can I make out the reddish hue of its coat.

All this comes to pass in an invisible land, since, in the land of normal observation, the facts would be quite different: a stroller, a stray dog, a sunset, an overgrown waste-ground.

This invisible land is the land of observation and imagination. The traveller is not alone on his journey! Two sisters keep him company and lead him by the hand. One sister is called Observation, and the other Imagination.

But what is the conclusion? The conclusion is simply this, that I may, contrary to everything, to all established order and society, create within me a world emancipated of all laws except the transparent laws of my own personal impressions. And what may this signify? There are two worlds, we know—an old and a new world. And what is this for a world then? A third world? There are two ways: and is this, then, a third?

Natasha makes an appointment and fails to keep it.

I arrive half an hour before the time.

There is a public clock at the cross-roads. It reminds me of a barrel. A barrel, of course! Two flat dials. Two bottoms. "O, empty barrel of time!" trembles on my lips.

Natasha ought to come at half-past three.

I wait. O, she won't come, of course. Ten past four. . . .

I wait at the tram stop. There is movement all around me. I alone am standing motionless. . . . All the wretches who have lost their bearings spot me from afar as they might a lighthouse. And then the fun begins. A strange woman accosts me.

"Will you be so kind," says the stranger, "as to tell me if the twenty-seven tram will take me to the Kurdinskaya?"

It would not do for anybody to suspect I had a rendezvous. They had better think "This broadly smiling young man has come to this corner to attend to other people's happiness, he will explain everything, direct and comfort. . . . To him! To him!"

"Oh yes," I reply, almost swooning with civility. "The twenty-seven will take you to the Kurdinskaya. . . ."

But then I pull myself together and rush after the woman:

"But no! No! You must take the sixteen."

But let us forget about the rendezvous. I am not in love. I'm a kind of genie of the streets. Ho! flock to me! Flock to me!

Twenty past four. The hour-hands joined then shot apart at an angle.

"That's a fly rubbing its feet. The uneasy fly of time."

How stupid! What's a fly of time?

There is no sign of her, she will not come. A Red soldier bears down upon me.

"Tell me," he says, "where's the Darwin Museum?"

"I don't know. . . . Over there, I think. . . . Excuse me. . . . Excuse me. No, I don't know, comrade. I don't know. . . ."

Come on! Whose turn next? Don't be bashful. . . .

A taxi drives up, describing a sharp turn. Just look at the driver's contempt for me! He does not despise me with his whole being, no! He would not stoop to despise me with his whole being. His contempt does not go further than his gloves!! Comrade driver, believe me, I'm an amateur; I haven't the slightest idea where to turn your machine. . . .

I'm not here to show people their way. . . . I've got my own business to attend to. This halt of mine is enforced and regrettable! If I smile, it is not good-nature, but a nervous twitch . . . just look!

"Which is the way to the Varsonievsky?" The driver raps out the question over his shoulder.

I explain in a fluster: "Over there, there, and there. . . ."

And thinking it over, why shouldn't I post myself in the middle of the road and apply myself seriously to the job that is thrust upon me?

Here's a blind man now. This one simply yells at me! And pushes me with his cane. . . .

"Is number ten in sight?" he asks. "Eh? Ten?"

"No," I reply, almost fondling him. "No, comrade, there's no ten. Only two. Ten is coming along."

Ten minutes have already elapsed since then. What am I waiting for? But, perhaps, she's hurrying along somewhere, on wings?

"How late I am, how late!"

The woman has already gone on the sixteen tram, the soldier is already entering the cool rooms of the museum, the driver is already tooting along the Varsonievsky, the blind man is already sulkily and pretentiously clambering on to the front platform, with his cane held out in front of him.

They are all satisfied! Happy and content!

But I lounge aimlessly, smiling.

And they still flock and question: an old woman, a drunkard,

a group of children with a flag. I am already beginning to thrash the air with my arms: I can no longer simply nod my head (with an upward throw of my chin) like any chance passer-by—no! I am already extending an arm with an open hand. . . . Another minute, and I shall be gripping a baton in my fist.

"Stand back!" I shall shout. "Stop! For the Varsonievsky? Turn round old woman, to the right! Stop!"

And behold! A whistle between my lips. . . . I'm whistling. . . . I have a right to whistle. . . . Children envy me! Stand back! Aha. . . . Behold! I can already stand between two tram-cars. Behold! I stand there, with one leg forward, my hands behind my back, propping my ribs with a purple baton.

"Congratulate me, Natasha; I have become a militia-man. . . ."

Then I notice Abel (my neighbour) standing at a distance watching me.

Natasha will not come, that's obvious. I beckon Abel.

I: You saw that, Abel?

ABEL: I did. You're crazy.

I: You saw that, Abel? I've become a militia-man.

(Pause. Another glance in the direction of the clock. Ten to five).

I: Nevertheless, it's all beyond you. The metamorphosis into the militia-man took place in an invisible land.

ABEL: Your invisible land's idealistic delirium.

I: And do you know the greatest miracle of all, Abel? It's that I figure in this magic land for some unexplained reason as a militia-man. . . . One might think that I ought to journey through it in peace and dignity as behoves a landowner thereof, and that a flowering prophet's staff ought to gleam in my hand. . . . And just look—a militia-man's baton in my hand! What a curious blend of the practical and imaginary worlds.

ABEL *(preserves silence)*.

I: And stranger still is the fact that it is the guiding principle of indivisible love, and none other, which has transformed me into a militia-man.

ABEL: I fail to understand. This must be some sort of bergsonism.

I made up my mind to bury the cherry-stone.

I found a spot and buried it.

"Here," I thought, "will spring up the cherry tree I planted

in remembrance of the love I bear Natasha. One day, perhaps, some five years from now, we shall meet, Natasha and I, in Spring at the foot of this fresh tree. We shall stand on each side of it—cherry trees are not very tall, and, standing on tiptoe, we shall be able to touch the very topmost blossom. The sun will shine down brightly, but Spring will still have a vacant look, for it will be that time of Spring when turbid gutters tempt children and when this imaginary tree is due to burst into flower.”

I shall exclaim:

“Natasha, bright and sunlit is the day, and the wind is blowing, spreading further the brightness of the day. The wind is rocking my tree, and it creaks with its lacquered joints. And each of its flowers rises and falls, to rise again, and that is why it varies its hues from rose to white. That is the kaleidoscope of Spring, Natasha. Five years ago, do you remember, you treated me to cherries? Indivisible love makes of memory an inspired beggar. To this day I remember the palm of your hand stained lilac from the cherry juice and how you made a cornet of it when spilling out the cherries. I bore away a cherry-stone in my mouth. And I planted a tree to commemorate the fact that you did not love me. And behold it is flowering. I see clearly the laughing-stock I was then; Boris Michailovitch was the man, for having conquered you, and I was the dreamer, the child. I was looking for a thrush while you kissed. I was a romantic. But behold: a hard, virile tree has sprung from the seed of the romantic. Do you know that the Japanese think cherry a man’s colour. Behold! here stands a squat, strong Japanese tree. Believe me, Natasha, romanticism is virile and should not be derided. . . . For everything depends on the approach. Had Boris Michailovitch come upon me squatting in the waste-ground as I buried the cherry-stone, he would once more have sensed his supremacy over me, the supremacy of a man over a dreamer. But I was at that instant secreting a shell in the ground. It has burst in a blinding explosion. I was secreting a seed in the ground. This tree, Natasha, is my child, begotten of you. Lead hither the son Boris Michailovitch gave you. I shall judge if he is as healthy, as clean, as absolute as this tree, born of one you considered a child.”

I had come home from the country. Abel detached himself from the shadow of a wall. Abel is a professional worker. He wears a skull-cap, blue socks, and sandals. He is shaven, but his cheeks show blue-black. Abel always looks unkempt, as if he grew a beard. One might even imagine that he had but one cheek, and that a blue-black one. Abel has an eagle nose and a single blue-black cheek.

ABEL: What's been happening to you? As I was passing by in the train to-day, I saw you squatting down in the waste-ground and digging up the earth with your hands. What's the matter?

I: (*Silence*).

ABEL (*striding up and down the room*): A man squatting down and digging up the earth with his hands. What can he be doing? Impossible to tell. Is he attempting an experiment? Or is he in the throes of a fit? No one can tell. Are you subject to fits?

I (*after a pause*): Do you know what I'm thinking, Abel? I'm thinking that dreamers ought not to have children. Of what use are dreamers' children to the new world? Let dreamers plant trees for the benefit of the new world.

ABEL: That's not provided for in the Five-Year Plan.

The land of observation begins at the head of the bed, with the chair which you set near the bed as you undressed before going to sleep. You may wake early of a morning: the house is still in slumber and your room is full of sunshine. Not a word. Don't stir, don't disturb the immobility of the light. A pair of socks lie on the chair. They are brown. But in the bright, immobile light you might suddenly observe among the brown knitting wool, separate, mobile, variegated strands, a purple strand, a blue, an orange.

A Sunday morning. I am once more treading a familiar path to visit Natasha. An appropriate heading would be: "Trips to an Invisible Land." With your permission, here follows a chapter from these *Trips*, a chapter which ought to be entitled:

"THE MAN WHO HASTENED TO CAST THE STONE"

Shrubs sprouted in the shadow of a brick wall. I was strolling along the path flanked by these shrubs. I noticed a hollow in

the wall and was seized with a desire to throw a stone into the hollow. I stooped to pick up a stone at my feet. . . . There I saw an ant-heap.

It was twenty years since I had seen an ant-heap. In those twenty years, of course, I had frequent occasions to tread on ant-heaps. And I very likely did notice them, but I saw without thinking: "I'm treading on ant-heaps." What happened was that the word "ant-heap" simply detached itself in my consciousness, and that's all. The living "image" had instantly and subversively allowed itself to be petrified in a glib and current phrase.

Oh, then it all came back to me! Ant-heaps are unearthed by lightning glances. One follows another. There, look there! Another! And so it happened now. One after another three ant-heaps appeared.

From my level I could not see the ants; the eye only caught a certain stir of forms, which might very well have been thought motionless. Eyes give themselves readily to illusion. I looked on and was satisfied to think that those were not ants swarming in the ant-heaps, but the ant-heaps themselves crumbling like dunes.

Gripping the stone, I stood some four paces from the wall. The stone must find its resting-place in the hollow. I swung my arm. The stone flew and hit a brick. A spray of dust fell. I had missed. The stone dropped among the shrubs at the foot of the wall. Only then did I hear the protest of the stone, a protest already voiced in the palm of my hand long before that palm had unclosed.

"Wait!" cried the stone. "Look at me!"

I had really been hasty. I ought to have examined the stone. For there can be no doubt, it was a remarkable thing. And now it was lost in the shrubbery, in the undergrowth, vanished for ever! And I who had held it in my hand had not even observed its colour. The stone might have been tinted lilac: and if not monolithic, it might have been composed of several bodies; or, again, it might have been partly petrified, with the remains of a beetle or of a cherry-stone in it; or, again, the stone might have been porous; or, finally, it might not have been a stone at all I had picked up, but a gangrened bone!

I met an excursion party on the road.

Twenty men were marching across the waste-ground, where the cherry-stone reposed. At their head marched Abel. I stepped out of the way. Abel did not notice me, or, to be more exact, he saw me, but did not take me into consideration; like a fanatic, he swallowed me whole, without waiting for me to agree or protest.

Abel detached himself from his flock and, turning to face it (with his back towards me), exclaimed, with a mighty wave of his arm:

"Here! On this spot! Here!"

A pause. Silence.

"Comrades from Kursk!" shouted Abel. "I hope you've got imagination. Imagine then, and don't be afraid!"

Oh! Abel is trying to shove his way into the land of imagination. He's taken it into his head, perhaps, to show these excursionists the cherry tree blossoming in memory of an indivisible love?

Abel is racking his mind to find a way into the invisible land. . . .

He paces up and down. He stops and kicks up his leg. He repeats the kick. And yet again. He is trying to kick himself free of a plant which has got entangled round his ankle.

He gives a final stamp with his foot and shakes off the last blades. (What a number of plants in this story of trees, of shrubs.)

"On this spot will soar the gigantic structure of which I told you."

. . . "Dear Natasha, I have overlooked the most important thing: the Plan. The Plan exists. And I have acted without consulting the Plan. In five years' time, on this spot, this waste-ground of ditches and useless walls, will rise a concrete giant. Sister mine, Imagination, how rash you are! They will begin laying the foundations in Spring—and what will be the fate of my silly cherry-stone! Yet, the tree dedicated to you will one day blossom in the invisible land. . . .

"Excursionists will journey hither to see the concrete giant.

"They will not see your tree. And is it really impossible to make an invisible land visible? . . ."

This letter is imaginary. I never wrote it. I might have written it if Abel had not spoken as he did.

"The building will be laid out in a semicircle," Abel explained. "And the interior of the semicircle will be made into a garden. Have you got imagination?"

"Yes," I said. "I see, Abel. I see clearly. Here is the garden. And where you stand will blossom the cherry tree."

1930.

VENIAMIN KAVERIN

Veniamin Kaverin was born in 1902. He studied at the Institute of Oriental languages, and is now a demonstrator in Russian literature at the Leningrad University. He began publishing in 1921, after joining the group of the "Serapion Brothers." His first works were fantastical tales. In 1925 he attempted a more realistic subject: his tale, The End of Haza, which treated of the Leningrad underworld, enjoyed a considerable success. Two years later Kaverin published a novel, The Trouble Maker, or Evenings on Vassily Island, which portrayed the life of the Soviet intelligentsia and that of a number of famous writers and scientists. So far his most important books are his Five-Year Plan sketches, collected under the title of The Prologue (1931), and his novel, The Anonymous Artist, which, by its defence of romanticism and the artist's independence, provoked a series of fierce attacks from the left wing of Communist criticism.

THE ANONYMOUS ARTIST

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

"Whom do you vote for, Teacher?"

I

*"They were amazed at the wisdom and frenzy of the man."
—Don Quixote.*

THE thief strolling about the "Court Hotel" stopped in front of a jeweller's window and watched the movements of the languid, curly-headed shopkeeper, who, standing behind the glass like a dummy suddenly come to life in a panopticum, stretched out his hand which stuck far out of a close-fitting cuff to take some object from the velvet-lined show-case: "I'd like to murder him and burgle the shop. . . ."

Floor-polishers were going by with swaying buckets and holding high the ochre-stained standards of their craft. . . .

Some girls jumped off a tram and burst out laughing as they caught a glance from a sailor who had leapt after them into the crowd. . . .

A narrow-shouldered upright man, wearing a top-hat, rode by

in a cab clasping a portfolio on his knees and smiling hypocritically. . . .

A prostitute was carefully leading a drunkard round a corner where a few beggars had stationed themselves on the dirty, glittering pavement. "He's had a drink, and now he's taking a girl home. She's a fine 'un and healthy. Everything will happen as it should in society. . . ."

Archimედov halted and rapped on a panel with his cane.

"For the thief, for the young girls, for the thankless task of the floor-polishers, for that hypocrite who rode by with his portfolio, for that girl—for all of them, you, and you alone, are responsible," he declared severely.

He looked strange in his long overcoat, cap, and spectacles, on which there glistened drops of rain.

"You talk as if I were running the administrative department of the Regional Executive Committee."

Shpectorov's profile traversed the opaque glass of the shop-window that had been half cut away by a shutter; it broke up into numerous reflections of heads and shoulders, all striding on their own, and leaving behind them feet that lengthened and shortened alternately.

That profile had so much identity that it could, at will, have prolonged its life in the glass. It did not remain, however, but followed Shpectorov from the window of the "Academy" to the window of the "International Book."

"I'm thinking of how technique has outstripped morality," said Archimედov. "And of the fact that personal dignity . . ."

A confused noise of voices and breaking plates interrupted him. A man carrying a plasterer's trowel emerged from a door which flew open, and its misty frame became reflected for an instant in Archimედov's spectacles, in a vision of muttering and sipping mouths, of hands stretched out for mugs, of a silhouette nervously dancing by the telephone, stopped abruptly by the passage of a waiter with a swaying tray; in a vision that had all the manifestations of an interrupted dream.

"Let's go home, Vanya."

The man coughed, then spat in the woman's face.

"And of the fact that personal dignity ought to be a component part of Socialism," Archimედov concluded. "Just look!"

He pointed to the photographs displayed in front of a cinema:

Elizabeth Bergner's melancholy face was looking out of the half-opened doors of a car which was reflected in the glittering asphalt made bright by tyres. There were gleaming lights. A tall man in a top-hat and cloak was striding away without glancing back.

"This car decides our dispute about the West. That's what the Constructivists are pining for, with their ideas for westernizing the Soviet East. They don't appear to see that if we turned out cars like this, they would be a perpetual reproach to us while there still exist men like the plasterer, who spat in the woman's face."

Shpectorov was peering closely at the photograph, trying to find out the make of Elizabeth Bergner's car.

"It's a Rolls-Royce, a car made for the films," he explained. "It would fall to pieces on our roads. We'll construct a type of our own."

(That was London. The rain was falling steadily. Mackintoshes glistened. Supers were walking along in couples snuggling closely to each other. A halo cast by the fog glowed over the lamp-head.)

"I shan't take on the job of settling your dispute with the Constructivists. But I agree with them. The West for us is a box of tools, without them we can't even construct the simplest wooden shed, to say nothing of Socialism. But you were saying . . ."

"I was talking about illusions," Archimедov said. "A box of tools is not enough to begin a new era. In the fifteenth century not a single workshop would admit an apprentice until he had proved himself able to work at his craft honestly and in accordance with all the statutes and aims of the state. The weavers of those days used to burn publicly any cloths which were found adulterated with hair. Masters who were found guilty of giving false wine measures were thrown off roofs into sewers. Just think what would happen if the next session of the Tcheke were to pass a Labour Morality Decree. There wouldn't be sewers enough for all the unscrupulous masters."

He pointed to an official escutcheon hung over the gates of a house.

"Describe that escutcheon from the point of view of the materials," he demanded.

Shpectorov stood up on tiptoe and, taking off his cap, flung back his head.

"Putty, paint, wood, and metal."

"Now from the point of view of logic," Archimedov suggested.

"Rifle, propeller, shafting, motto, sickle, and hammer."

"And now from the teleological point of view."

"One of the aspects of the defensive strategy of the Union of Soviet Republics," Shpectorov replied without a moment's hesitation.

Archimedov was rubbing his spectacles on his overcoat sleeve.

"I can't bear the sight of that escutcheon," he exclaimed at last. "It's monstrous. It proves that the heraldry of the Revolution has fallen into the hands of *Upravdoms*. The sculptor responsible ought to have a social rebuke administered to him. And not only because of the vile execution, but also because of his failure to grasp the connection between personal dignity and craft responsibility. You may call this 'romanticism!' I'm not afraid of the word. It has its own merits. 'Romance' once upon a time was the name Russians gave to the iron-mounted, chain-suspended beam used for battering city walls. 'Romance' was a battering-ram in those days. Since then it has come down in the world, and become a term for a particular kind of book. Now it has fallen so low that the Moscow 'Westerners' relegate to it the rôle of 'perspective.'

"To romance?"

"No, to romanticism. They fail to see that this wall-shattering weapon might still come in handy for fighting against declining honour, hypocrisy, meanness, and boredom."

Shpectorov stood with his hands on the rail of Lebiazhy bridge. His shadow, tumbling from the rail, splashed to and fro in the rust-red water. Ripples carried it ashore. He stood there, broad-shouldered, tranquil, with a clear-cut face and lizard eyes which were turned to the West.

"I understand you at last," he said clearly. "You would like to demonstrate that man, by acting according to Nature, reacts on himself. But that has already been said by Marx. You assert that the principles of our conduct change too slowly compared with the growth of our productive capacities. If I understand

you rightly, you assert that our attitude to work and to each other improves at a slower rate than the development of technique, and by that very fact impedes further improvement. In other words, the dead inventory of Socialism is growing faster than the living one. I agree with you. But that is not new either. Do you know who wrote about it? Lenin! Illusions?" This word was pronounced when they had crossed the bridge and were sauntering across the Square of the Victims of the Revolution. "I would agree with you if it were possible to extract from this idea of yours the tanning materials which we have hitherto been obliged to import from abroad. And the moral?" They were turning the corner of the Electrocurrent Club. "I've no time to ponder over this word. I'm busy. I'm constructing Socialism. But if I had to choose between morality and a pair of trousers, I'd choose the trousers. Our morality is the morality of a world in process of creation." They walked up the stairs. "And no plasterers spitting in their wives' faces, no prostitutes, no hypocrites. . . ."

The door swung open before he could finish. A tall, black-haired woman with an immobile face stood on the threshold.

"And what am I to do with the milk?" she demanded, with a gesture of despair. "He won't suck any more. He wants meat."

II

"Give him meat," said Archimedov.

From the floor he picked up a rattle and a horned lion and deafeningly began shaking the rattle over the dumbfounded child.

The room was not too clean and the floor had not been scrubbed for over half a year. There was a cradle rocking gently and a table strewn with bits of paper which, like dead butterflies, had settled everywhere, on the bed, on the chairs, and on the floor. A painter's easel stood propped against one of the walls; it was so laden with dust that one could scribble on it with a finger, and a word of sorts had already been scrawled there. Some soiled red rags hung as curtains on the windows, while the window-sill was a mass of variegated blotches and stains, used, to all appearances, by somebody as a palette. The room looked shabby and theatrical.

Shpectorov sat down astride a chair.

"Here's your rom-ance," he muttered mockingly.

Archimedov continued to shake the rattle with a serious countenance and all the thoughtfulness of a lover of animal-music. He listened to the noise. The raindrops were drying on his spectacles. Forgetting the child, he rattled away for his own pleasure.

"You're jesting with History," he said. "Once upon a time it succeeded in turning a stick into a prophet's staff and that staff into an Emperor's sceptre. Who knows but this toy may one day prove the symbol of imperial power!"

The child lay on the table, rosy, plump, and bald-headed. The words "symbol of imperial power" offended it. It began to cry.

"Look," said Shpectorov. "It disagrees with you."

"And you?"

"I? I think we are History. And we need neither illusions nor toys."

Esther was carrying the babe up and down the room. Her dress swung in rhythm.

"Sleep, dolls, sleep, night long ago
Has curtained the windows low.
Whilst Vasska the cat's asleep,
A bear runs playing bo-peep
Through streets on a lime-tree leg
And a birch-tree crutch for a peg.
He peers into corners and crannies
And grunts and growls 'grrah, grrah, grrah.'"

"You're instilling false ideas into it," said Archimedov, who had been listening.

She continued her singing, and shook her head angrily at him to make him talk softly.

"You're instilling false ideas into it," Archimedov repeated in a whisper.

Shpectorov caught him by the arm, laughing.

"Come to my room, we're in the way here," he said.

Shpectorov lived next door, but his room was quite different, even the floor and the walls. It was narrow and light, and had a white shelf running round it very near to the chalk-white

ceiling. A long Turkish pipe hung on one of the walls, and on the other a curved Turkish dagger bearing the Arabic inscription, "There is no God but God," upon its voluted blade, and underneath the dagger there was an ancient hunting-horn set in twisted Persian silver. All this had been brought from Turkmenistan, a souvenir of the civil war. A yellow blind, the colour of butter, was drawn over the window, and near by stood a low carpet-covered divan, while everything on the writing-desk was neatly and conveniently arranged. The refutation of accident might very well have been the idea underlying the order of that writing-desk. The room reflected a man who was confident, ambitious, and self-respecting; and long-legged, too, for a small man would not have consented to that shelf.

Shpectorov switched on the light.

"I understand at last why we can never agree," he said. "You refuse to consider in your arguments the thesis of individual fate. In every culture, whether Greek, Egyptian, or European, individual fate seems to have been left out of the brackets, freed from the laws of history. We're expending all our energy to confine it within these brackets. We know that the annihilation of this right to individual life will mean the annihilation of family, industrial and doctrinal traditions. And here you're defending this right! Ram-amanticism? In your own language this is but a pseudonym for the fanfares which are the dream of every petty Bonaparte! Be careful, this idea may trip you up! I would be happy if I could convince you . . ."

Shpectorov did not complete his sentence. There was a knock on the window.

On the other side of the wall Esther was finishing her song. She fell silent for an instant, then raised her voice once more:

"Through streets on a lime-tree leg
And a birch-tree crutch for a peg. . . ."

Shpectorov opened the window: a bear, the very same one, with the lime-tree leg, was walking up and down the yard. It was excitedly waving its paws. Then pulling a cap over its ears it stood up in the middle of the yard and lifted its snout. No, there was no lime-tree leg, it carried an umbrella instead and wore goloshes.

"Hey, what do you want?"

The bear gave a start.

It threw down the handful of sand with which it was again going to attract attention to itself, and shook its paws clean.

With an obstinate shake of its head, it began sniffing in all the corners.

“Will take them all in a heap,
Carry them all to the lair. . . .”

sang Esther.

She suddenly appeared in the doorway with the child in her arms.

“It’s for me,” she said, running the words together and continuing her refrain. “It’s Tanka’s bridegroom.”

Archimedorov nodded.

“Who’s Tanka?” Shpectorov asked in a whisper.

“We’ll take Tanka with us,
We’ll take her on the sly. . . .”

sang Esther.

She went away rocking the child, which had pushed its tiny fist in her face.

“Your wife’s evidently bent on involving herself in a police case,” Shpectorov said, examining the man-bear with interest.

Archimedorov shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

Getting the child to sleep at last, Esther explained her intentions in prose:

“Tanka’s my school-friend. They want to marry, but can’t get permission. From half-past eight to nine her parents hide themselves from tax-collectors at their relatives’. We’ll raid the apartment, pack the things and drive her away with us.”

“Thus did the ancients,” Archimedorov remarked.

She went out and returned a minute later buttoning her coat.

“I shall have to call on the parents afterwards and inform them of their daughter’s flight.”

An enormous shadow kept flitting about the yard. Tanka’s bridegroom could not restrain his restlessness.

“Well, go, then,” Archimedorov said gravely.

She kissed him pensively.

“Look after Ferdinand.”

Archimedorov shut the door after her and came back.

"The annihilation of the right to mechanical existence," he said, and sat down at the writing-desk. "I agree with you. It would be worth beginning a new calendar at this point. But how is it to be done? You seem to think that to this end illusions must be subject to the maximum penalty. As for myself, I think that in order to achieve this, all Higher Educational establishments ought to be endowed with a chair of illusions."

Shpectorov was looking out of the window. Tanka's bridegroom, forgetting his farewell bow, grabbed hold of Esther and pulled her towards the gate. A conveyance was waiting for them. The horse was stamping its feet on the cobbles. Shpectorov lowered the blind.

"Ah, you're back to illusions? And you're not afraid of what I'll say about trousers? Do you know, I'm beginning to feel sorry that you weren't born two centuries earlier. Robespierre would have entrusted you with the organization of a procession in honour of the Supreme Being. You would have preached pity for the unfortunate, respect for the weak, and declared a campaign against cruelty. And you would have walked about in a blue tailed-coat holding a bouquet in your hands."

He burst out laughing.

"A tailed-coat and a bouquet! That's what you'd like us to include in the Five-Year Plan!"

Archimedov stood up.

He stood there, facing him, pink-cheeked and flaxen-haired, as if he were really arrayed in a blue Robespierrian tailed-coat.

"I've had enough of this discussion," he said, and went out. But he returned a minute later with the sleeping Ferdinand in his arms.

"Good-bye. It's time to get to business."

Shpectorov carefully tucked in the quilt.

"Where're you off to, you odd fellow?" he asked. "Where are you taking this babe which you were to watch as if it were the apple of your eye?"

The quilt hid Ferdinand head and all. His lips were moving drowsily. Archimedov kissed him on his forehead.

"The rebellious stamp their image on the world," he declared solemnly. "But with an infant in our arms we must combat hypocrisy, lack of honour, meanness, and boredom. It will give us courage! It will demonstrate that our children will conquer."

III

"Speak, austere limestone!"—CHLEBNIKOV.

Bakers were beginning their night labours.

Musicians were plodding wearily homewards carrying their instruments packed away in black cases.

Stray trams were running off their accustomed tracks.

White night had entered the Socialist town. It looked empty like a drawing which outlines but weakly the realization of a long-thought-out plan.

A house clock was striking above Lassalle's head, which was flung back to behold the Soviet sky.

Archimедov was gazing respectfully at it from under the arch of Perinaya Street.

"Look!" he said to the child, carefully uncovering its face. "There is the man in whose honour you are called Ferdinand. He would be our ally now if a Prussian junker had not killed him in a duel sixty years ago."

The child slept on, raising its eyebrows, perplexed.

Archimедov rocked him in his arms for a while and then crossed the road.

"Lassalle!" he exclaimed. "Commander of men, killed by a chance bullet! Gusts of wind blow in your eyes during the Spring floods. Autumn rains drench you. And hoar-frost gathers on your face in the Winter. You behold the flow and flux of people and History sleeps its nights in the shadow of your pedestal. Tell me, which of us is right? Whom do you vote for, teacher?"

Lassalle remained silent. His head, too, was motionless, with its frowning forehead and lizard eyes which were turned towards the West.

From The Anonymous Artist, 1931.

BORIS PASTERNAK

(For Biographical Note, see p. 377)

Boris Pasternak, the poet, whose biography appears elsewhere, has written in his Safe Conduct (1931), a prose book of peculiar interest. Pasternak attempts to situate the poet in the present age, and not unnaturally many of his pages become an allegory on the great Futurist and Revolutionary poet Mayakovsky, who committed suicide in 1930, and who figures as the almost anonymous hero of these pages. A new edition of The Safe Conduct has recently been suppressed by the Soviet Censorship.

THE SAFE CONDUCT

THE DEATH OF A POET

I SHALL speak of that from age to age recurring strangeness which might be called a poet's last year.

A sudden end to projects that seemed endless. Often nothing is added to their endlessness, but the new, and only now admissible, certainty of their end. And this is handed down to posterity.

They change their habits, wax enthusiastic about new projects and cannot boast enough of spiritual exaltation. Then, suddenly, the end comes, sometimes violent, more often natural, but even then, by its renouncement of self-preservation, very like suicide. This makes people pause and ponder. They waxed enthusiastic about new projects, edited the *Contemporary*, and were about to publish some *Peasant* journal. They were busy organizing a twenty-year retrospective exhibition and were taking the necessary steps to secure a visa for the Continent.

But, others, it appears, saw them in those days persecuted, querulous, and tearful. Men vowed for decades to voluntary silence suddenly grew childishly terrified of it, as of a dark room, and clutched at the hands of chance visitors, catching at their presence to avoid being left alone. Those who witnessed these states of mind refused to believe the evidence of their eyes. For men who had received more assurance from life than it grants

to most people, talked as if they had never begun to live and had wanted both experience and prop in the past.

But who will understand or believe that the Pushkin of 1836 was suddenly given to see himself as any Pushkin—as the Pushkin of 1936? That a time will come when suddenly one regenerated, expanded heart will harmonize the answers uttered long ago by other hearts in reply to the emphatic centre, which still lives and throbs, and which thinks and wishes to live. That the hitherto multiple cross-currents finally become so rarefied as to grow suddenly smooth as water, and, coinciding with the pulsations of the centre, begin a new and henceforth uniformly throbbing life. That this is no allegory. That this really happens. That this is an age of sorts, impetuously consanguineous and real, though as yet undefined. That this is a kind of inhuman youth, yet one that impinges so abruptly and joyously upon the continuity of preceding life that, by the anonymity of this age and the call for comparison, its abruptness makes it most kin to death. That it resembles death. That it resembles death, and yet not death, in no way death, and would that men did not desire such full resemblance.

Reminiscences and works, works and hopes, the created world and the world to be created blend together in the heart. And what was he like in private life is a question sometimes asked. You shall be enlightened in a moment about his private life. A vast sphere of bounded contradictions contracts, concentrates, flattens out, and suddenly, with a simultaneous shudder in all its parts, begins its bodily existence. It opens its eyes, takes a deep breath, and throws off the last vestiges of pose given it in temporary aid.

And if we remember that everything, that sleeps at night and acts by day, walks upon two legs and is called man, it is natural to expect corresponding reactions in its behaviour.

A huge, real, and realistically existent city. Winter holds it in its grip. Dusk comes early to it, and the working day draws to its end in the light of evening.

It was terrifying once upon a time, in the long ago. It had to be vanquished and its reticence forced. Much water has flowed since then. Its confession has been forced and its obedience become a habit. A big effort of memory is required to imagine how it could once inspire such trepidation. It

twinkles with lights, coughs into handkerchiefs, and clicks its abacuses. Snow covers it.

Its alarming enormity would have rushed past unnoticed had it not been for this new and savage impressionability. What is the bashfulness of adolescence when confronted with the vulnerability of this new birth? Once again, as in childhood, everything tells. Lamps, engine-drivers, door-pulleys, and goloshes, the moon and the snow. A terrible world!

He stretched out and forward, in the backs of fur coats, in sledges, he rolled as does a coin, rolled down a railway track, and, rolling far ahead, fell softly into a mist, where a pointsman in a sheepskin coat stooped over him. He spins, grows small, seethes with contingencies. It is so easy to come across some slight want of attention in him! Some of the griefs are deliberately imagined. Mountains are consciously made out of molehills. But even when inflated they remain perfectly insignificant by comparison with the wrongs that were so triumphantly trampled upon but a short time ago. And that is the crux of the matter! Comparison is impossible because that had occurred in the former life to destroy which had been such joy. Oh, if only this joy were more constant and probable!

But it remains incredible and improbable. Yet, as that joy tosses from extreme to extreme, nothing, in no way and nowhere in life is so tossed.

How people become discouraged! How Anderson's tale of the unfortunate duckling repeats itself! And what mountains they make of molehills!

But perhaps the inner voice is misleading? Perhaps the terrible world is right?

"No Smoking"; "State Your Business Briefly"; are these not truths?

"He? Hang himself?" Rest assured. "In love?" He? Ha, ha, ha! He loves only himself.

A vast, real, and realistically existent city. Winter and frost hold it in their grip. The creaking, willow-plaited, twenty-degree-of-frost air throws a barricade across the road. Everything grows hazy, uncertain, evanescent. How can such sorrow coexist with such joy? This then is not the second birth? This is death, then?

. . . The beginning of April discovered Moscow girl in the

white petrification of returning Winter. On the seventh it began to thaw for the second time, and on the fourteenth, when Mayakovsky shot himself, few had grown accustomed as yet to the novelty of Spring.

. . . When I came there in the evening, he was already in his coffin. The faces that thronged the room in the morning had, in the meantime, been replaced by others. It was comparatively quiet. There was scarcely any weeping.

. . . Suddenly I saw his life that was clean gone now, outside, under the window. It stretched away from the window, to one side, like some tranquil, tree-bordered street. And our State was the first to come there and take up its stand near the wall: our State, our unprecedented and impossible State, heading impetuously into the ages and accepted by them. It stood in the street below, and one might have hailed it or taken its hand. Its palpable strangeness somehow recalled the deceased. The resemblance was so striking that they might have been twins.

And it occurred to me in the same irrelevant way that this man was perhaps that State's only genuine citizen. It was his blood of all bloods that throbbed in the most natural way with the novelty of the times. He was strange with all the strangeness of the age, and to the last remained but half fulfilled. I recalled the traits of his character, his in so many ways absolutely original independence. These traits could all be explained by his familiarity with states of being which, though envisaged in our time, had not yet reached the full consciousness and vigour of everyday life. From childhood he had been spoilt by the future, which he had mastered early enough, and, apparently, without much difficulty.

1931.

LEONID LEONOV

Leonid Leonov (b. 1899), the son of a journalist, fought in the civil war. His first tale appeared in 1922. This was followed by his Tartar tale, Tuatamur (1924), The End of an Insignificant Person, and Kovyakin's Note-Books. By 1924 Leonov had moved into the front rank of the "Fellow-Travellers." His first novel, The Badgers (1925), assured his position. He next published the novels, The Thief (1928), Sotj (1929), Skutarevsky (1933), and a number of tales, stories, and plays. Leonov plays an active part in the life of the Soviet literary organizations, and is one of the editors of the review Novyi Mir (The New World).

SKUTAREVSKY

THE PORTRAIT

THE brothers saw each other so rarely that some people thought that they had only their name in common, and, at first, neither of them attempted to contradict this. They had both escaped fairly early from their malodorous paternal nest, but the weapons and philosophical principles with which they had embarked upon the highway of life were very different. And, like most people who owed their success to their own efforts, they had little need of relatives. . . . Feodor Andreyevitch had made a good start—as good as that of his brother Sergei—and it was not for nothing that they were nicknamed the bandit-brothers. His academy work, *Avvakum in a Baikal Gaol*, was, for its time, a confession, and even, perhaps, a manifesto. It was a rough and almost naturalistic portrayal of an abstract, slandered man, but the representation was more than usually forcible for a beginner. Compressing his green, scorbutic lips, the enormous priest sat on the mouldering straw in the very corner of a narrow underground cell; and this despondent green set the tone of the picture. Gripping a skull-cap in his fist, he watched with gleaming eyes the tiny grey animal that was sniffing at his ragged boots. The creature looked hungry; the priest looked enormous. A quotation from his biography served as an epigraph: . . . "There were many mice, and I beat them with

my skull-cap, the only available weapon. . . ." On the whole, it was not clear what the artist was hinting at by his picture of a violent rebel who had wished to assault the autocrat Nikhon and his quarrelsome courtiers, and who had been reduced to fighting mice. It must be that the currents of public opinion in those years had found some common ground in that picture. The reaction had been oppressive, and the Russian intelligentsia, which had hailed the first Revolution without any definite programme, was glad of any formula that helped its confused researches. Feodor Skutarevsky was given a travelling scholarship abroad, a medal in a satin case and a profitable order to paint the portrait of a certain worthy old gentleman who was preparing to meet his death.

The "bandit" brothers met before Feodor's departure for Italy; the young physician came to take leave of the young artist. Sergei Andreyevitch frankly confessed that he liked the *Avvakum* even less than his brother's fashionable, wide-lapelled summer suit. They were like two game-cocks, and neither would yield an inch of ground.

"That's not a picture, but a perfect aberration of space and of your talent," Sergei explained. "All inspiration—do understand me correctly—ought to be filtered through by reason. Otherwise it will dash you, like a runaway horse, into a precipice."

Sergei drew his arguments from the laws of science. Feodor laughed. His suit displayed his waist to advantage. Success had taught Feodor Andreyevitch to laugh in a somewhat superior manner.

"But science, old man, discovers only that which the soul knows already." He pulled out a gold watch with a certain parade: there was a minute to go. "Science, old man, has reached the limits of knowledge. Strange it has not taken to flight yet . . . in every sense of the word. Leap, if you like, into the blue oblivion of the universe, and may the angel of Science help you! . . ." He was young, impudent, verbose, noisy, and, in his artist way, beatifically silly.

They were not to see each other for a long time. There was little news of Feodor: his one letter contained confused and trivial pronouncements on the Italian Renaissance; he wrote of its marvellous, ozone-permeated atmosphere, and after a banquet, apparently, a confused paragraph about the resurrection

of the dead; he stated, moreover, that to leave the Renaissance mentally was like leaving a capital. But his confused state of mind was evident behind the shell of his verbal enthusiasm. His first act upon his return was to go and look at himself in the Academy gallery. It was as if he had come out of the sunlight into a dark and stuffy cellar. The *Avvakum* struck him as an unwieldy hybrid of northern barbarian fantasy.

This spacious canvas, which had brought him early fame, was rapidly ageing; the colours had shrunk and gone black like muslin, but only because the theme itself had become outmoded. The reaction had given birth to a sterile and pretentious æstheticism in art; the new generation loudly attacked Skutarevsky for his "literary" tendency; the newspapers in their different way—but on the whole sympathetically—described the sufferings of a young, pimply man, who, it appears, had been arrested in front of the picture with a knife in his hand. But there was a grain of truth in all this, for the direct plastic aim had been sacrificed to a story about the priest's uninteresting rags and sores. Feodor Andreyevitch announced to this friend that he had decided to take up a stand for pure art. His second work, *A Woman at her Toilet*, caused perplexity, though the matter was easily explained. A certain distinguished signorina of the Apennines, who adored young painters, had served as the model. But some, out of old habit, sought hidden meanings in this ageing, solemn, and mournful personality. His subsequent works, the gloomy *Death of Peter*, the idyllic *Haymaking*, and the impersonal *Recruits* spoke eloquently of the artist's acute and untimely crisis. Nobody could assert now that the author was being artful and was concealing his meanings, and, on meeting the artist, people dropped their eyes knowingly. The new exhibition was attended by his friends, by the whole of that unsavoury band of people who were overjoyed at the obvious failure of their strongest rival and who kissed Skutarevsky loudly and uncleanly on the cheek, congratulating him on his success. . . . But they were all a little ashamed, and he, the author of this carnival, more than others; he finally felt like running away with all his daubs under his arm. For a long time nobody bought Feodor Andreyevitch's pictures.

An enforced silence of three years helped the young master

to collect his strength. His first success had been so striking that he was not yet forgotten. His last small canvas, *The Strike*, painted, to all appearances, in a mood of extreme bitterness, was almost thrown out by the jury. The judges, however, feared a scandal which would have broken the liberal armistice of the moment. The picture showed a crowd of workers in the shadow of low factory buildings, and in the middle of the yard, surrounded by workmen, stood a short-statured man. The sun beat down upon his rounded, perspiring back. He was waiting. His glance, turned obliquely towards the open gates, betrayed an expression of worried impatience. The workers gazed in the same direction with heavily frowning curiosity. A coachman outside the gates was hurriedly leading aside a pair of rearing factory horses; in the carriage sat a smartly dressed girl. She was frightened; for she already saw that which nobody in the yard could see. And although everything seemed peaceful there, with only an unruly cloudlet hurrying above the dreary earth, those looking at the picture could already hear the fast staccato clatter of Cossack hooves. A masterly palette and an ironical chiaroscuro confronted these two groups more pronouncedly and malevolently than any of the pamphlets which were so profusely distributed at that time in the Tsar's provinces. . . . The picture attracted a great deal of attention; it was looked upon as an evil prophecy of the future, and people hurried past it. Its theme was thought almost indecent in a background of seemingly cloudless political weather. The intelligentsia was afraid of that which it had been assiduously fostering for the last half century. One journalist noted down a conversation which he overheard near the picture: "It's time, time, old man, to transfer our money to foreign banks!" And though Feodor Andreyevitch had, because of his wounded vanity, demanded a fabulous price, the picture was sold on the very first day.

The rosy, capacious cheque bore the same signature as its predecessors. He tried to make out the name of his unknown Maecenas. He finally spelled out the Maecenas's name, which was Zhitzarev. Become a connoisseur of a sudden, this wise and sturdy old man purchased all of Skutarevsky's subsequent canvases. He appreciated the force of the work, and never bargained; he did his purchasing, however, by proxy of a eunuch whose face resembled a handful of dry, preserved peaches.

Zhiztarev preferred to make his influence felt by the inculcation of luxury in exactly the same way as the ancient Chinese used to mollify their warlike northern neighbours. . . . Shortly before the declaration of war, Feodor Andreyevitch had, one morning, burst into the Maecenas's house after a drunken party. He intended, apparently, to demand an explanation. Tall and sparse-haired, and with his jaw set at an angle because he held between his teeth something that smoked and crackled and looked like a cigar, he shakily entered a spacious room without taking off his hat, and, leaning on the grand piano, waited for the master of the house to appear; an elderly valet stood on the threshold, groaning and nursing a dislocated hand. . . . Then Feodor Andreyevitch beheld a man with a lackey's face and parchment-like forehead; he was smartly dressed and had a stoop. Such a man could never be surprised in a dressing-gown; he might even have been in the habit of sleeping in this uncrumpled and cast-iron-like suit which history would, in a short while, impose upon him.

He entered quietly; his watery eyes were more than indifferent.

"I've come to make your acquaintance and to demand an explanation," Feodor Andreyevitch rapped out through the tobacco smoke, spreading around him the drunken confusion of his attic. "My name's Skutarevsky."

The other smiled covertly with the portion of his face specially reserved for that function. He knew what was coming and could combat the boredom of the impending conversation only by heightened condescension.

"I am listening." He bowed, frowning at the odour of bad tobacco.

"You're a bourgeois; I'm an artist. . . ." Feodor Andreyevitch opened fire.

The other interrupted him:

"Wait. Take off your hat; you'll find it easier to think."

He said this in the most simple way, without being offensive. "Your cigar, by the way, is made out of peat and cigarette-ends, and might compromise a less famous artist than yourself. Your talent gives you the right to something better. . . . Won't you have one of these?" And he opened a box of special mamilla cigarettes in gold wrappers. "I am listening."

He gingerly took away Skutarevsky's cigar, and, without

changing the expression of his face, threw it out into the garden. It was an incredibly blue morning, a green coolness rippled outside, but Feodor Andreyevitch's yellow face looked as if it had been waxed.

"... And I'm an artist," Feodor Andreyevitch began with diminished self-possession. "You buy all my paintings. I demand . . . I demand . . ." Sobering a little, he forgot what he had come to demand.

Zhiztarev bowed.

"I agree, the prices were excessively low. Would you like me to reconsider them?"

"No. I demand an explanation. . . . What does it mean?" Skutarevsky threw in more quietly, and looked smaller.

Once again the portion of the face sewn on to the cheek-bone under the eye gathered in a smile.

"As a rule I am fond of decorative pictures," said the Maecenas with an air of tactless sincerity. "Those done with the brush please me more than those done in pencil." Though not an old man, he wagged his head like one. "Oh, if I had your animal temperament! Women must love you madly; there's something male about you. You've probably got hairy and odorous armpits. You're very handsome. . . ." He said this again with an expression it would have been difficult to label insincere. Then he added: "If I had a second daughter, I would not let her marry you. You will never make any money."

This completed Feodor Andreyevitch's confusion.

"What do you mean?" he muttered.

"You are treading a perilous path, young man!" The right of calling Feodor Andreyevitch a young man gave him the advantage of fortune as well as of that of age. "One must serve one taskmaster at a time. You must choose between art and social reform. Your *Strike* is a means of organization. Do you realize that? The face of that worker in the foreground, turned smilingly towards the public, is a challenge. Your paintings ought to be hung in a dark closet where no children might glimpse them, even by accident. Briefly, young man, I beseech you to return to the pursuit of pure beauty."

"Is it your fat cheque-book or your numerous lackeys that give you the right to advise an artist?" Skutarevsky fired again, turning pale.

"Then I shall simply crush you," Zhitzarev said dryly, and the cigarette-box snapped. He let slip a minute of extreme stupefaction. "I have, up to date, eighteen of your canvases. They are not particularly brilliant, but they comprise your entire youth. And you are not so young now, my young man!"

Feodor Andreyevitch sat still, feeling shabby as if he had been given a telling, though not painful, smack on the head.

"That would be an act of vandalism," he jerked out at last, seized, for the first time in his life, with a sense of awe for the sacred right of property.

"It's a question of public hygiene," the other corrected wearily in the tone of a grown-up speaking to a child, and the cigarette-box slowly opened. "You're too impetuous and forward. Curb yourself when young, and you will go much further in old age. Have a cigarette, have a cigarette. . . . I like the smell of good tobacco."

Another lackey—this time a tall and well-built lackey—brought in the coffee. The lacquered Chinese tray trembled in those incredible hands that were intended for other, rougher, and more active work. After sipping the good coffee Feodor Andreyevitch became very mild, but not out of fear. A fight with the lackey would only have spoilt his light summer suit, which he had donned for the first time on the occasion of the imminent visit. Zhitzarev became more affable in his turn, expounded his views as he exhibited his collection of Tintoretto's, was charming, conducted his guest to the door, and even thrust the whole box of cigarettes into the artist's pocket in farewell. As he did so he suggested their travelling abroad together. "As a creator you must have a deeper understanding of the Lord's hurried, yet tolerable, creation. I mean the world! Business has hitherto prevented my studying this machine. The trip will cost you nothing, but you will have to enlighten me as to the meaning of various phenomena." The compliment and the offer were vague and rough, but a Maecenas has always the right to be eccentric, and Feodor Andreyevitch consented to this arrangement, though, in fact, it embraced a wider sphere of knowledge than he could boast of.

Later, when they were already on the way, they were joined by Shtruff, who, at that time a fop and spendthrift, had undertaken an extensive voyage with a view to observing the racial

distinctions of the women of all the different countries; he had also money enough to collect *objets d'art*. Thus Fate put another temptation in his way: Feodor Andreyevitch did not know how to decline in time his delicate and spendthrift generosity. Fateful prophesying on the strength of cheques altered his appearance: he grew bald and looked older. He even grew "Bourbonized," as he called it. He had scarcely any time left for work: it was senseless to sweat over things of which more perfect models were easily purchasable. The creative flow dried up as with Gogol's portrait-painter. Over a period of several years he painted only a portrait of a certain senator and two other cumbersome trifles: the *Procession of Satyres*, an intemperate echo of Rubens; and the *Creation of Eve*, a question which preoccupied him deeply. It was just such learned and useless things that determined a future academician's path, but then the War broke out. This savage and unreflecting slaughter sobered the artist. He thought of a canvas which would have had the effect of a war-cry or shot behind the trenches. But Zhitzarev, who had come to notice the artist's mental divagation, ordered him to paint his portrait: the scale, the intention, and the price were excessive.

. . . His artist's bile, which each one of us mixes in some proportion with his paints and without which an artist would be impossible, had apparently not yet evaporated. Had it not been for the War, this portrait, which remained in the confinement of a Petersburg closet, would have placed Skutarevsky in the front rank of social painters. He took great pains over it; the model aged, and the portrait pursued it as a shadow. But the Revolution outstripped the artist; the dying class had now been stripped of its mask, and its decrepit face became transparent to all the world. . . .

Working silently, Feodor Andreyevitch kept his work to himself till complete, but the day came and the old man faced the canvas. The last sun of an Indian summer slanted on the panes, and the old man's black shadow fell at the foot of the portrait. This latter was not so much the biography of a class as a reserved and truthful pamphlet spoken through a genuine artist's compressed lips. Zhitzarev stood, in the canvas, drawn to his full height, holding a cheque-book in his outstretched hand; that was a man who bought. All the passions of the world had spread

over that passionless and almost symmetrical face, but they had already neutralized each other; the process had come to an end in that crucible. The author depicted him as the best chancellor of his class, but this physician came too late, for his class was already *in extremis*. The entire, slightly green and aquarium-like background of the picture was painted over with scenes representing an attempt at a collective social analysis. It was in reality an artist's notebook in many planes, a complex of speculations not always verified by exact knowledge, but brilliant in form, a mixture of perplexities, condemnations, and interrogative reproaches. . . .

1933.

NICOLAI TIKHONOV

Nicolai Tikhonov (b. 1896) served in a hussar regiment during the Great War and later in the Civil War. In 1921 he joined the "Serapion Brothers." His first book of poems, The Horde (1922) and Mead (1923) brought him immediate fame. Tikhonov's poetry shows the influence of Gumilev and the English romantics, and the ballad is his favourite form. His later poetry seems to be influenced by Pasternak, but since 1927 he has devoted his attention principally to prose. His stories display an equal talent. His first collection, The Venturesome Man (1927), exhibited an ironic approach to reality. His later stories are of a more descriptive nature, and are remarkable for their purely formal and artistic qualities: The Nomads (1930), a book about Turkestan; Blades and Chariots (1932), stories about the Civil War; War (1932), a narrative about the War of 1914 and the future clash of peoples. Tikhonov has repeatedly declared that a writer must in our day write "politically."

YORGYI

THEY called her Yorgyi, that is, "green," because the first word she lisped when beginning to talk was *yorgyi*. That must surely have been her very first word. One day her mother showed her the dazzling, incandescently white triangle, hung far out in the sky and unattainably lording it over the chasm in which the settlement was situated. But her small daughter looked past the improbable, troubling phantom at the dim and delicate nimbus of the sky sheathing its sparkling ribs, and that delicacy, overlapping to the snow and rendering it transparent and coaxing, was, of course, called *yorgyi*, and the girl cried out: "Green, green!"

Yorgyi she remained her life through. And she liked her nickname.

From somewhere above, from under the very vault, a shy beam of light, slender as a strip of tape, fell into the stone dwelling in which she had been born. A cauldron hung on a black, sooty chain in the hearth; live cows' eyes and live horns peered from corners, while on the walls hung horns of mountain goats. At the age of eight Yorgyi was betrothed to Katzyia,

of a neighbouring valley, and Katzyia, at the age of ten, knew that in time Yorgyi would be his and nobody else's. He also knew that if he refused her he would be ambushed and killed, because such an insult could only be washed out in blood.

As there was a scarcity of objects in the environing world, and as these had, at all costs, to fill out all the spaciousness of life, they willy-nilly fell to pieces, grew imponderable, changed their outlines, and existed as fictions; otherwise life would have been too harsh and denuded.

The chain from which the huge bulk of the cauldron hung, and the fire blazing beneath it, had no permanent characteristics. The fire might be winter or summer, gay, nocturnal, festive; or might sprawl gloomily on the ground, growling and pretending to be a short-haired dog; the cauldron might have been a horseman galloping through stormy bursts of smoke towards the masters of the house, sitting in expectation of their supper; whilst the chain was, at times, a ladder giving access to the sky, towards the green delicacy fringing the slopes of Tetnuld. This was the name of the dazzling pyramid that overhung the settlement.

On the promontory above the turbulent loops of water stood a low church, on whose walls had been painted, no one knew when, red horsemen with uplifted spears: but the church exercised no compulsion over Yorgyi. It was always shut, and was so small that it was fitter gathering ground for field-mice than for stalwart mountaineers. The priest had long ago cropped his hair and taken off his cassock, and did his mowing and ploughing with the villagers in the fields that clambered up the mountain side. Neither had demons sway over Yorgyi. They dwelt, for the most part, among the ice of Tetnuld or in the forests below, but as Yorgyi had never been to either place she had avoided seeing the demons.

In the vicinity of their house, as befitted, stood an old tower, grown blind and deaf. Within it footsteps echoed like memory. It was as ugly as a century-old woman, as surprising as a century-old woman standing without crutches and gazing at the sun. Yorgyi knew each storey of it and every passage. When she was small she used to clamber bravely up the notched tree-trunk which replaced the ladder, from floor to floor, to the very top floor, where were only bones—the bones of beasts

killed in the chase and eaten. These bones could not be thrown away, for that would have meant the disappearance of the mountain goats and bears, and the end of all hunting. She always experienced the same fear: it seemed to her all these bones would put on flesh, and, springing at her in a vast herd, would trample her underfoot, dash downstairs, and overturn the cauldron and crush the dog sleeping at the entrance to the yard. She fled from that last room without banging the door, because there were no doors in the tower.

The swarthy pride which the years had affirmed on her face attracted nobody. She did not consider the preference shown to the other girls as among the number of her necessary failures. She did not know herself what she was like, whether she had beautiful shoulders or not, what sort of legs she had, and hands; she did not give this a thought when gathering stones, clearing the fields of pebbles and stones, or when, flushed by the heat of the brazier, she would go out into the yard, her cheeks aflame, and chop the logs with a heavy hatchet.

Neither the church nor the demons had sway over her. There remained people. The people lived the measured and complex life of landowning mountaineers, dejected by the petty worries of primitive farming. And Yorgyi did not like them. She could never understand why the whole earth was so much of a piece and so immaterial. The neighbouring settlements she visited led much the same life; they all had the same towers, the same hearths, the same chains hung down from the ceiling, and the same cauldrons rode through fire and smoke, in haste to meet the people. The same bones of consumed animals lay on the top floors of the towers. And dominating all this, in the sky, stood the white pyramid of Tetnuld, crowning an impassable wall of snows.

Yorgyi was neither malicious nor stupid. She was just ordinary. When her mother died, together with her sisters and relations from the other settlements she cooked a thick lentil soup for the whole district, baked heaps of pies, and then walked through a crowd of dressed-up women with puffed eyes and glanced at the dim foreheads of the moaning weepers with the surprise and estrangement of a bashful man, beholding a real and simple sorrow which had been artificially and pretentiously presented for his delectation.

She glanced at the men, some of whom were crying, and she felt ashamed that, having been carried away by the weepers' gloomy and picturesque voices and having entered into their almost festive solemnity, she could not weep herself; and only at times did her breath catch and her hands tremble.

Then the priest, whose long hair had been cut, arrived, bringing the key of the locked church. He had been persuaded to say something religious, for the deceased was an old woman. The priest intoned something brief of his own which nobody else understood, and the coffin was taken away to the cemetery, and black handkerchiefs were distributed all round as souvenirs.

Katzyia arrived. He was young, and his revolver tugged at his narrow Kutais belt, and on entering the village he drank two wooden cupfuls of *araki* and kissed all the men and women in turn, but he did not kiss Yorgyi. He gave her his hand and she gave him the flat palm of hers, for Katzyia did not please her the least in the world.

They all sat and sang, drank *araki*, ate a mountain of pies, slaughtered a sheep, and dogs ran about the yard dragging the smoking guts. Katzyia smoked cigarettes and talked of the coming winter. And all agreed that the winter would be severe and that there would be snow enough to cover the roofs.

Yorgyi felt so sick and sad that she went out on the roof—which was easy to do, since the door of the room where they were drinking gave straight on to the roof—whence could be seen the mountain Lagilda, which separated Yorgyi from the valley where Katzyia lived, and Tetnuld; but the demons dwelt as sadly among its ices as sheep on summer meadows. Yorgyi began crying, for there was no way out of her country, and her world consisted of a cauldron on a chain and of cows' eyes blinking out of the gloom at the bright fire, with the blunt contentment of animal satiety. Yorgyi had no wish to return below among the drinking people and she went to sleep in the hayloft.

Throughout the summer she was very ill at ease and lived through various imaginary episodes, but towards winter she became more tranquil and stronger. While sorting potatoes with her sister, for winter storage, she stumbled over a log, and her sister steadied her, catching her by the breast. Touching her breast, her sister laughed and began fumbling with her.

They forgot the potatoes till their father shouted to them not to spoil the weather, for, as it was, they were expecting a severe winter.

She salted meat, searched for silky grass between the mountain rocks: this was stored for the winter. At the first snowfall she rushed into the yard and washed herself in snow, but the winter very soon bored her, for in winter the distressing poverty of the world seemed to her even more crude and defenceless than in summer, and people lived like animals, only they ate more than the animals, and drank *araki*, which the animals could not bear.

She drank *araki* and sprawled drunkenly on the bed, and when nightmares began to stifle her, she went into the yard and beheld the same air-poised pyramid of Tetnuld, sparkling in grey lightnings, and, to all appearances, slightly swaying. She shook her finger at it, but the next minute she was terrified, for a black cloudlet had detached itself from the mountain and scurried along the sky, and she was terrified lest the cloudlet might be the handiwork of demons and bring her misfortune. That night she dreamt of Katzyia, who wore only a short felt coat over his nakedness, and she hated him with all her heart.

A few days later was the night of All Souls—the eve of Epiphany. All the housewives cleaned, scrubbed and tidied their homes. A wall of smoke stood over the hearth and tore at the eyes. Large bottles and wooden mugs were set out brimmed with *araki*, and a cloth was spread over the low table.

Yorgyi had no fear of the dead, for they quitted her memory as soon as they were interred and did not return. She talked of them, but very seldom and always without regret. How had their fate changed? They were living similar winters in another world, only they lived their winters on Tetnuld, where it was still colder, and perhaps they drank less *araki*, and every year they visited the living and were entertained as no one else would be.

The table was set with plain and fancy meats, pies, cheese, hens, and the flicker of candles blent with the wispy smoke of the sunken fire. Her father, with a muttered prayer, begged the dear deceased not to disdain his house and to visit once more their forsaken property.

And when he said: "My dear ones, eternal memory! Let us not quarrel. Give us what you had in life. Forget us not,

but let us remember only good. Enter, dear ones, I pray you!" a shuffling was heard behind the door, the door creaked, Epiphany Night entered the room, the wind blew the candle-flame down, the smoke hugged the floor—and in strode Ghigo, a distant relation, pale as a corpse.

Her father trembled, thinking in the simplicity of his heart that it was a werewolf; but Ghigo, making a bow and kissing everybody in turn, sat down in a corner and related how, with a friend, he had spent two days trying to reach Halde on business and had been compelled to turn aside, though it was night—so bad were the snowdrifts and frost in the mountains.

He rubbed his hands and feet with *araki*, and drank so much that he wished to dance, but he was put to bed for fear of offending the deceased, who by that time were thronging the house. They were to stay, invisibly, in the house till the coming Monday and were then to return, satiated and satisfied with their reception.

Ghigo stayed another three days in the house. He drank, ate, slept, talked of Djvari, which he had visited, and which was quite another world, full of things that were unknown in the mountains. He had seen much and was not to be compared to Katzyia.

He produced a slender book and from it read many wonderful things, but eyes went on seeing only the cauldron on its chain, the cows' eyes, and the *araki*, of which there was abundance. Yorgyi took hold of the book, and, as she read a little, spelled out a couple of lines, but understood nothing, as it was all about electricity and locomotives, and she had never heard of such things.

As she hesitatingly read out the lines, everybody burst out laughing, and Ghigo looked at her, laughed, seized hold of her, and, lifting her from the floor, kissed her. She became confused of a sudden, hit him on the shoulder with her fist, and went out to chop wood in the yard. The frost was hard, and she chopped for a long time to get warm.

Ghigo, as he took leave, kissed her again, but out of sight of the others this time, and, not knowing why, she licked her lips. After his departure the winter grew still more severe and gloomy. Towards spring the cattle-fodder gave out. One of the cows fell sick; it staggered first of all and hiccupped, then fell on its

knees and dug at the straw with its horns. They had to slaughter it, and everybody regretted that it did not pull through for the spring. Yorgyi used to walk out of the village in the deep snow and gaze down the road, but there was no Ghigo.

Yorgyi did not like the early spring, for that was the time of the dead. They floated down turbid torrents. The torrents swirled the corpses of those who had perished in the snowdrifts and avalanches. Now the snows had melted and were bearing their victims below, to those valleys from which the unfortunate had ascended the mountains. The settlements carried on an exchange of those who had set out to pay their visits in the winter, had lingered in near-by snowdrifts, had fallen ill and died or had perished on the way, and had been given hospitality till spring. And now they had to be interred in their native villages, and stretchers with corpses swayed along all the tracks, while the weepers' monotonous solemnity spiralled in the light, green-blue air.

One evening a ram strayed from the flock towards the torrent, and Yorgyi went in pursuit with a handful of flour. She lured the ram with the flour. The ram was gulping water from a stone, and, seeing her, it began playing with her, jumping from stone to stone. The flour-mill stood near by, and the water splashed past the small wooden structure in a resounding torrent.

Yorgyi caught the ram and hauled it by its large, twisted horns, but as she was going by the flour-mill, somebody pushed the ram away and seized her by the shoulders and dragged her into the mill, into the noise and cold of the small building. Her heart stuck in her throat; she could have hit and knocked down anybody, for she was strong, and that dark conceit of her character would not allow whoever it might be to play coarse pranks with her, but here all her strength melted away, for in the half-light of the mill she at once recognized Ghigo. He was saying in her ear:

"When a Caucasian's house is on fire, the Caucasian warms his hands."

She suddenly kissed his hand, and, to the terrible thunder of the furious spring torrent tearing through the mill, put her arm round his bristly neck. He threw his felt coat on the cold floor, they fell, and were transformed into such a resounding

torrent that Yorgyi thought the mill was crashing on their heads. But the mill did not fall, and when she raised her head and pushed Ghigo's hands away, without letting them out of her own perspiring fingers, she laughed and said:

"Poor Katzyia, poor Katzyia!"

"Don't talk to me of Katzyia," said Ghigo gloomily, jumping to his feet and picking up his coat. And she laughed a second time, for the ram was peering through the door of the mill with laughing eyes, and it bleated, as might a man, wishing to tease another.

A feast-day in Muzhala ripples with all the colours of dresses, sashes, skirts, slippers, blouses; and even the old, wasp-waisted, goat-eyed, unvarying women, all shrunken and dry, do not spoil it; they sip their drinks as peacefully as corpses.

Bulls bellow thunderingly, dragging their last slow steps. The butt-ends of axes thud dully against their skulls; daggers hiss as they penetrate flesh; and a stifling stream of blood gushes on the variegated grass. Nothing can spoil the feast.

Svansky caps and fur caps, Balkarsky felt-coats, Imeretinsky felt-coats, house-coats, and coats from the Co-operative, boots, slippers, cartridge-belts, revolvers in holsters, simple and ornamented, set in silver, daggers of all shapes.

And what isn't there on the tables! The guests borrowed all they lacked from their neighbours, they emptied their larders, and stoves, and, all important, there was *araki* everywhere. That was their joy and their need. The wine fermented by poverty and diluted by sorrow—the sour drunken joy of the festive board, smelling of the chemist's shop. And there is an ever-quickenning exchange of small horns, round cups, wooden mugs, of *araki*; and the dance has already begun. Women's choral dances, men's choral dances, and mixed choral dances stamp the ground with merry feet, and every one may that day show himself in all the splendour of his enjoyment, which the feasters will no longer remember by the following day.

As they go home they will still stop on the way to have another fling, another drink, to embrace, to cry a toast or to honour the *tamade* (the toast-master) in the Georgian manner, forgetting that they are no longer feasting in the village, but among the stark mountains, in a wild forest thicket; jolting

down a narrow path on sledges drawn by oxen, whose puzzling lilac eyes peer apprehensively over the precipice.

The dances are winding twist and loop; people flutter in the cobweb of common gaiety, pitying neither their feet nor their throats; and the smoke of a multitude of pipes rises in one rejoicing cloud, in which the song spins, crowning the dancers. And the joy of stamping feet and flashing eyes follows enraptured the hawk-like coquettishness and goat-like endurance of the dance.

Yorgyi did not take her eyes off Ghigo. But the latter, by agreement, deliberately avoided dancing with her. Katzyia might put in an appearance, and they would give themselves away in the eyes of all if they danced in public, and he would at once guess that if they danced like that here they would dance still better at their own festivals.

They feast well in Muzhala!

Yorgyi looks on—drunk, clapping her hands. Ghigo and his first cousin, a girl from Zhabez, trip in an enchanted circle.

They do not know the meaning of weariness, and their art is boundless and equal to their untiringness.

The dancers, staggering and skipping to hide their fatigue, sink down on the grass, on the logs, and are served with *araki*. And then a man strides up to Ghigo, a man like all the others, festive and staggering from the dance, and with a single shot in the head kills Ghigo and disappears among the wild prancing cries and the whirligig of the unfinished dance. Ghigo dead is more passionate than Ghigo alive, and only a trickle of blood mars his face. The blood trickles down his cheek as when Yorgyi bit him, and his lips must still smell of *araki*, but the terror of it all is that he cannot be kissed. He can never again be kissed.

. . . Much later a rumour reveals the name. It sounds thus: Simeon Garseliani. That is the name of the murderer, fled to the hills.

Who knows the tangled threads of blood-feuds and their ways, secret as the plague? When a father contentedly stands up and in defence of his son says: "It was my son, of course, who slew, and none other" (and he says it with pride); when the Soviet chairman lays low his fellow-villager and plugs an extra bullet

into him when already dead; when a night-bullet shatters the judge's lamp on the eve of the murderer's trial as a warning that the murderer's conviction will entangle the judge in the same noose of blood; or when the murderer himself appears and announces to all the world that it was he that slew, and that they must not think it was an accident.

The summer goes by, gloomy as the winter, and the winter follows, gloomy as the summer.

Yorgyi stood the *matchub* (the winter quarters) badly, where the sheep scowled and the cows' flanks quivered from undernourishment, and where horn knocked against horn when the cows scratched themselves at night. Yorgyi daily sifted the coarsely ground flour and baked pies, half stuffed with grass, with a special grass, for this latter was not the cattle's preserve: man, too, sometimes needs grass, when there is a scarcity of flour. A mixture of grasses hisses in the cauldron. And the next winter will be the same. What changes could be expected, when there was no highway leading to the country, no way out of the country.

The scurried sheep scowl, the cows cough, lolling their lean, despondent snouts in the tobacco smoke, and the men sit smoking small pipes with long cherry-coloured mouthpieces, small, because tobacco is scarce. And the well-salted flour-mixture spurts at the bottom of the black cauldron, snorting like a satiated horse. The fire flares and falls, for the snow keeps falling upon it through the roof. Step outside, and the snow-drifts are higher than the house: but why go outside when all the necessities have been laid in store, and one need only feed the pigs and take care to cover potatoes with straw, and, in one's spare time, spin, mend, darn, wash the dishes, hew wood, fetch the cattle, and not think of anything?

Towards spring, Katzyia, the first guest, arrives to announce that the roads are clear. He wears a new costume and a belt, dragged down by the raven weight of his revolver. Katzyia has grown and matured. Katzyia wishes to kiss Yorgyi as a bridegroom. She backs away from him until she puts her foot into the cow-food, and he begins to laugh and slap his sides—short-sighted Katzyia! . . . Yorgyi runs away, gripped with a strange fear, the fear of men. She takes to sitting among the women, or alone in her dark corner, and persistently avoids that corner of

the hearth where the bulky men sit smoking their small pipes on long, low benches.

Of late Yorgyi has understood the weepers' simple truth. The art of bidding farewell is one of the most ancient arts on earth, and to master it was certainly not within the power of a young girl. The weepers' marble cheeks, their silver eyes and hollow throats, shrilling with wild and measured moans, all this was strange to her and brought no solace. But the truth of their artificial despair lay in the fact that their so grievous loss in life had turned their despair to harmony, at once original and terribly simple.

Yorgyi moved about with a black neckerchief on her head and kept her eyes on the ground, and only at night she bit her hands and startled her sister with sudden bursts of mournful tenderness.

There was a house in the settlement which Yorgyi had hardly ever frequented before, and where she now spent every spare moment. In this towerless house dwelt two Young Communists and their two Young Communist wives—Marya and Tamara.

When Yorgyi visited them they talked with her and made her sit down in a room, hung with multicoloured papers and pictures, which Yorgyi soon found herself deciphering.

She knew already that these were objects from the world beyond the mountains, the world called "Moscow." All that was outlined on the walls, all that was related by Marya and Tamara, she summed up as "Moscow."

The four-wheeled machines, dashing into a crowd with multicoloured flags and ringed on all sides by terribly high houses, lighted by invisible braziers, was Moscow. And the other machine with the chimney, from which smoke belched, spreading not low over the ground but high into the sky, and the houses on wheels it pulled in its wake, this machine, too, was Moscow. And the hawk with the vast wings and full of people, and the network of roads, and the crowds of people, and the many multitudes of unfamiliar objects, all these were Moscow.

Once, staying behind with Marya and Tamara, she found a young, sunburnt man, wearily drying his wet clothes by the hearth. He looked round him through his spectacles with

narrowed eyes and replied to all questions willingly and loquaciously. He explained that he was sent by the government to prospect for gold in Svanetyi. The Svans, elbowing each other, exchanged mysterious whispers, and, when he had gone to bed, searched his bag, but found no gold. And this young man, whenever asked whence he came, answered but a single word: Moscow. And when Yorgyi compared him with the people in the pictures, she was overcome by her old childish panic which had dogged her on the top floor of the tower and had made her think that the dead bones were coming to life. And so it was now: she fancied that all the people in the pictures would leave their places, grow taller, and become like the man sitting by the hearth. She became terrified and ran away.

Growing thin, neglecting to wash herself, forgetting to eat or sleep, Yorgyi often sat whole hours in front of the pictures in the Young Communist house, and each picture was larger than her small life, and high up on the ceiling hung a burnt-out electric lamp, and Yorgyi inquisitively fingered it, now finally believing that the objects depicted in the pictures really existed, but that one had to get at them.

Rumour said that Katzyia had gone to Kutais and would not be back in their parts for some time, that he wanted to wed another and did not want to take Yorgyi, and was afraid of her vengeance; but she listened and smiled darkly, for she was indifferent. Her neighbour's child died, and she herself asked if she might weep for it. And when she stood in the room, which vibrated to the piercing but measured moans of old grey women, and threw back her black neckerchief, all were pleasantly surprised at the shadow of real sorrow veiling her features. And that day she vanquished the best weepers, for she was beweeeping her own life and spared neither words nor moans, that were made so much fresher and more desperate by the contrast of her youthful features with the cold, loud art of the other mourners. After this cruel ceremony, when she had been carried out into the fresh air and had come to herself on the grass before the house, in the arms of the grateful relatives of the deceased, she sighed as after an illness.

Afterwards she began collecting her possessions, sorting and mending. She put aside a pair of shoes, her holiday slippers—those in which she had danced that feast-day in Muzhala. She

sat, needle in hand, and repaired her torn dresses that were humble as her native fields. She bought a pair of thick stockings, then cut herself a stout stick and sharpened the knife from which of late she had become inseparable.

In the night she awoke to the sound of strange sobs. Her sister was sitting over her in the dark, and, hearing her wake, she bent over her and asked her, burning her forehead with her hot breath:

"Yorgyi, Yorgyi, what are you doing?"

Yorgyi sat up, threw her arms round her sister, and they cried in silence. Then Yorgyi, drying her tears with her hands, told her sister in a whisper everything about Ghigo and of his death, but said nothing of Moscow, and made her swear a terrible oath to say nothing to anybody and not to worry about her.

The moon peeped through a crevice in the roof, a decrepit moon, and so white that it might have been moulded from yesteryear snows by the demons on Tetnuld and rolled down the ribs of that terrible pyramid. It had rolled off the mountain side and floated into the air, farther and farther away, and was now passing over the settlement.

Yorgyi sat in her bed, half naked in the dark, scratched her breast and pinched her arms, biting her lips to prevent herself screaming. She then rose up, went over to the extinguished brazier, found a live coal among the warm ashes, blew on it and held it to her hand. She held the coal until she had satiated herself with pain, and then threw it back among the ashes, torn, herself, with an utter confusion of feelings, and moaning to herself:

"Ghigo, Ghigo!"

She returned to bed. Her sister clasped her in her arms, and the silence was broken only by the flapping wings of the suddenly awakened hens.

Three days later, before dawn, Yorgyi left the settlement, and nobody knew the road she had taken or where she had gone.

November 1932.

SECTION D

PROLETARIAN WRITERS AND FIVE-YEAR PLAN LITERATURE

SERGEI SEMYONOV

Sergei Semyonov, the son of a metal-worker, was born in 1893, was educated at an elementary school and worked, until the Revolution, in a Petersburg factory. From 1917 to 1921, he took part in the Civil War, was wounded and held several responsible military party-posts. He is a member of the Communist Party. His literary career dates from 1921. His story, Typhus, and his novel, Hunger, attracted attention by their truthful realism. Like most of the literary novices of his time, he is indebted to Gorky. Natalia Tarpova (1927-29) proved his most successful novel. It portrayed the life of workmen and Party-men in a factory, and painted the environment and psychology of the new "Soviet" men and women in the style of Tolstoyan realism. Natalia Tarpova, the heroine of the novel, tries to solve her emotional tangles in the light of Party conscience. The novel, which has gone through numerous editions, has been adapted both for the cinema and theatre.

NATALIA TARPOVA

OF late Tarpova had begun to notice a tendency in herself to class all facts and everyday manifestations of life into one of two categories within her consciousness. It did not matter whether these were most trifling facts gleaned from the news columns of the *Red Gazette*, or whether they were everyday events immediately affecting Tarpova, as a member of the Party and as a member of the Collective Bureau; or, again, whether they were such general and considerable facts as the congress of the Comintern, the report of which Tarpova had had occasion lately to examine. All these facts and everyday events had, of late, assumed a new and particular significance, which forced Tarpova to class them in two distinct categories within her consciousness.

Facts and everyday events had assumed new and particular

But Comrades Ossipov, Tarpova, and Lebedev, before delivering the reports committed to them, discussed *Mopr* themes with Comrade Riabiev. This habit had become rooted, but it did not, on each occasion, bear the character of a "preparation." Nor did Comrades Ossipov, Tarpova, and Lebedev learn anything from Comrade Riabiev about *Mopr* that they had not known before. But the familiar truths about *Mopr*, which had long ago become boring, suddenly assumed a new interest after a chat with the organizer. Old words that had been heard and read a thousand times, started, of a sudden, new trains of thought, and that is why the report in the N workshop was listened to with such interest and why it produced a practical result in the form of an increased membership.

Tarpova became very interested in the Women's Welfare Committee, which, on Riabiev's initiative, had grown out of the Women's Association. In the work of that committee and in its very existence, even, Tarpova failed to perceive the direct, immediate, and clear aim, which she was accustomed to see motivating any Party "project"; and at first Tarpova found it hard to understand the necessity for such cumbersome and ungrateful work as house-to-house investigation of the working-class family conditions of the workers living on factory territory. But when she had, herself, made the round of some fifty families that had fallen to her share, and had seen for herself the workers' everyday life at close quarters, a whole new world of thoughts and feelings was revealed to her. She found it strange. She had some former knowledge of the conditions and life of the workers of her factory, and, after all, her own life was but a part of the common life of hundreds of worker-families. But now Tarpova saw this life of varied sameness, as she had known it before, only with new eyes: and this was due to the fact that she now saw it in the light of its relation to her own personal work and in relation to her own personal duties as a member of the Party, as a member of the Collective Bureau, and as secretary to the Factory Committee. And as soon as she looked at it with these eyes, she became convinced that this life ought henceforth to cease existing as a separate entity; that is, ought to cease existing outside of those eight hours which the workers spent in the workshops and at the working-benches, and which she, Tarpova, spent in the Factory Committee, in the Collective

Bureau, in the union, in the workshops, at meetings and sessions. It appeared then, that, with the end of the working day and the end of the last session, the sixteen succeeding hours were in no way different. No, it was the same eight working-hours that continued; and, with them must continue that particular inward state of mobilization, which immediately gripped Tarpova in the morning as soon as she left the house.

When Tarpova found herself saying to anybody: "I'm working in a factory," the word "factory" used to summon to her mental vision the Factory Committee, the Collective, the workshops, the workers at their benches, the sessions, the meetings, the club entertainments, the Party-training, in a word, everything that filled eight productive hours and two or more hours besides. But now the mental picture evoked by the word "factory" was far more comprehensive. It now comprehended that varied-monotonous life led by the workers in their spare sixteen hours, and this life made demands similar to those of Tarpova's eight hours spent at work.

Tarpova, as usual, when faced with new experiences connected with her work, discussed them with Riabiev.

"Yes, yes," Riabiev assented with his customary, friendly smile. And to Tarpova's surprise, the old and familiar expression of glad welcome and concealed expectancy once more lit-up his lean face.

"What I mean is this," Tarpova was saying, and, for some reason, growing heated. "Doing Party work in a factory—should not mean doing it only in the course of Collective or Factory Committee work."

"Yes, yes," Riabiev assented.

"What should we do, then?" Tarpova demanded. It puzzled her that Riabiev, contrary to his habit, did not pounce on her thought and develop it.

"I don't know."

"You must be joking, surely," Tarpova was on the point of saying, but she noticed that Riabiev looked confused.

"Well," he began thoughtfully, "you've seen how our workmen live inside the walls of their own rooms, with their Primuses and kitchens, with their beds and couches. . . . Yes, they don't live as one would like them to or as they ought to in a country which is striving to become Socialist. And what then? Suppose

we, the members of the Party, tell them that they are not living as they ought? They will simply reply that we, the members of the Party, are also not living as we ought. . . ."

Riabiev felt confused because he realized, at that moment, that he himself was not living as he ought, and that he had been living in that way precisely from the time when he and Levitova had taken their new three-room flat, had hired a servant, and had begun investing in furniture.

"We all of us defend the independence of our domestic life and shelter it from the life we live at our meetings and in public generally. . . . I don't know. I haven't given it much thought." He ended abruptly.

A minute later he took up the subject again, and, talking as if justifying himself (it seemed to Tarpova that he was justifying her), recounted his impressions of provincial Party-men in a district town which he had visited a couple of years ago.

"So you think, then . . . you mean we shouldn't do anything about it?" Tarpova asked in a frightened way.

"I don't mean that. We must do something. But how? There is only one way of doing something, and that is for us, Party-men, to set an example in our own personal life. . . . Yes, we must set an example, so that our workmen, whom we are asking to live differently, will not be able to reproach us. It's hard to be a model," he said with a special intonation of his voice.

"Ah, ha! He's got Levitova on his mind," Tarpova guessed.

And she once more sensed that compelling inner necessity of justifying Riabiev which she always felt as soon as she drew any parallel in the depths of her being between Riabiev and Levitova or between herself and Gabruch. "No, no; Riabiev can do it, but not I," she thought.

Until now, and without any hesitation, Tarpova had relegated all the manifestations of the Collective organizer's activity and conduct to her "first category," that is, to the facts and manifestations of life, forbidding her to love Gabruch. Riabiev was for Tarpova a model Party-man, whom she strove to imitate passionately, unhesitatingly, and without question. But a Riabiev living with Levitova, in a three-room flat, with a servant and various property—this "Riabiev model of life" agreed badly enough with the "first category." And the more contra-

dictory that this terrible and tempting model appeared, the more strongly Tarpova felt that inner necessity of including him in the "first category."

"He can do as he likes with Levitova, but I can't act in the same way with Gabruch," she insisted, not wishing to explain to herself why it was all right for Riabiev and not for herself.

"But we ought to set an example! We must!" Tarpova said with a fire that astonished Riabiev, and made his face light up momentarily with an expression of particularly joyful appreciation and concealed expectation.

"You're right," he replied joyfully. "We must set an example. I'm only saying that it is very hard—to set an absolute example, and especially in our 'transitional' (Riabiev smiled ironically, probably at himself) epoch. On the whole, it's scarcely possible."

But remarking that Tarpova was preparing to protest, he hurriedly continued:

"Wait, wait. Let us look at this not with our own eyes, but with those of the Party, which is applying a realistic policy to the country . . . NEP in economics implies NEP in other spheres of life! And what does that signify? What?"

He even became agitated, which rarely happened to him. It was apparent that he was voicing thoughts which had long preoccupied him, but which were either alien to his spirit, or which he had not pushed to their conclusion. His words lacked their usual inward conviction.

Tarpova felt her heart beat strongly.

"What does that signify?" Riabiev repeated. "You and I were born but yesterday. And even though our minds were ready to recognize the future, for which both of us are working, our feelings are still tainted with the colours of the present day. . . . After all, we are human beings," he pronounced excitedly, "and we cannot, of course, entirely resist that human part of us which completes us. And what completes you and me is the human part of to-day; that is, not our human part, the part we inherit from yesterday, but that human to-morrow, which we see with our mind, and which . . . Yes, and that is an advantage already that we see it with our mind, that it already has a place in our consciousness and has become our goal. That is already something."

"What, then?" Tarpova said dully. "What are we to do, then? Sit with our arms folded and wait?"

No. In Riabiev's opinion there was no point in sitting with arms folded and waiting, and the Party was, of course, carrying out its own work. This was the work of cultural enlightenment; this was the struggle for that very thing which is called the "new life," "new culture," "new morality," "new man"; this was a struggle involving a whole sphere of questions which were linked to the conception of the "new man."

"We're not idle," said Riabiev, blushing as conscientious people blush when they fail to express their thoughts in their own words and are forced to have recourse to banal, unconvincing, topical arguments. "We are, for example, liquidating illiteracy, we're building new dwelling-houses for workers, and we already have a Proletarian art" (he glanced apprehensively at Tarpova and confessed: "I don't understand this art. We must suppose that Proletarian art is really a good art). We are constructing workers' clubs and palaces of culture, we are building communal kitchens, we have emancipated women, and we have food now . . . and many other things."

"Yes, many things," Tarpova gloomily assented.

"Listen," said Riabiev after a pause, looking with guilty eyes at Tarpova's hand, the fingers of which were not at peace for a single moment. . . . "Listen," he repeated in a voice that caused the fingers to stop tearing and twisting the piece of paper they were holding, "I haven't given all this much thought. But I do know one thing: there will be a new type of man, because there will be Socialism. And what if—on the way towards this new man—we are still faced with unsolved problems to-day? We shall resolve these unresolved problems to-morrow; and to-morrow, other insoluble problems will take their place, but we shall resolve them the day after; and so on, until the new man will step forth into a new world. . . ."

"That's very convenient," Tarpova angrily retorted. "Shipusov knows that Socialism will be, and I know that the new man will be. But I should like to know my plan of action for to-day. I cannot postpone my 'insoluble' problems for to-morrow. I'm living to-day."

"That's what I don't know," Riabiev again confessed.

"No! You know, you must know," flashed through Tarpova's mind; but, glancing at Riabiev, she felt sorry for him.

"Is that really so?" she said musingly. "And how is one to live to-day? As one likes? . . . No, I cannot agree. It won't do, somehow."

"I didn't say one should live as one liked," said Riabiev wearily. "I'm only saying that the head upon our shoulders is all we have—of the new man, and all the rest of us belongs to the old. The Socialism which we are now building up in our country is the Socialism of the mind and of ideas, the Socialism of economics and politics, of new public forms and of new social relationships between people. But where it's a question of the Socialism of the heart and of the feelings, of the Socialism of our everyday life, of our character, of our habits, of our culture, of our morality, of our own Primus stove and bed—that's a Socialism which doesn't work out so well. . . . Why don't you want to work in the club? You should see how we've changed and organized the work," he suddenly asked.

Tarpova knew that the work of the club had really "changed." For the first time the club had succeeded in attracting the adult workmen. Not long ago Ipat Ipatitch had once more surprised his daughter by going off to the club together with Avdotia Iakovlevna. Tarpova would very much have liked to take part in the recently organized "adult family evenings," but Levitova was one of the organizers of these evenings.

"You know I've my hands full," she said angrily, feeling all the more angry since this was the third time she had had to refuse Riabiev.

This conversation did not, however, alter Tarpova's attitude to the organizer of the "Collective." She grasped that, in reality, neither Riabiev nor she had broached the principal issue. Riabiev ought to have spoken of Levitova, and she ought to have told everything about Gabbruch. But they had both lacked the courage and frankness.

"So nobody can help me, so nobody can tell me what to do," Tarpova thought bitterly, exactly as she had thought that evening when she had become conscious for the first time of her feeling for Gabbruch as a feeling of love.

In spite of these gloomy thoughts about herself, in spite of the joyless conclusions of the Women's Welfare Committee's

investigations into the conditions of the factory workers, Tarpova felt that all her sorrows and griefs had considerably enriched her inner self. Strangely enough, when Tarpova now addressed meetings or talked with workers, her gloomy thoughts and joyless conclusions proved an inexhaustible source of courageous and joyful words. Instead of robbing her of energy, they somehow excited her. And actually they really did excite Tarpova's energy.

But that happened only in company, only when "at work." In the evenings, when Tarpova remained alone in her room, these same gloomy thoughts and joyless conclusions not only did not excite her spiritual courage, but on the contrary proved as inexhaustible a source of contrary feelings. With the nostalgia of a young and full-blooded woman, Tarpova lay down on the cold, clean sheets, and, unable to fall asleep, listened to her own self, to her own powerful body, to her own evenly and firmly beating heart, to the flow of her own blood, to the ringing silence in her ears and all the rest of her restrained and repressed, yet young and impetuous, bodily life. Then she fell asleep and saw, in dreams, the images of the things she was afraid to imagine by day.

It had become a habit with her in these hours of solitude to solve the constantly tormenting question: "Why should Riabiev do as he likes with Levitova, and I be unable to act in the same way with Gabruch?" But there was only one way in the world of correctly solving this question. That was the "inward" solution, the inner voice, the heeding of her class conscience only. And Tarpova proceeded to the solution backwards. Unconsciously she made its solution depend on its relation to the whole sum of facts and manifestations of life, which she now carefully observed, and the "category" of which she decided for herself. It was in these hours of solitude that the facts and manifestations of life spoke with greatest conviction:

"Look at us, meditate upon us," they said, "and you will see that nothing prevents your loving Gabruch. It's all rubbish, nonsense, that you are alien to each other, that you cannot live together? Who told you that? Where have you seen others acting in this way? You're a woman, he's a man. You love each other. That is the all-important! And nobody can forbid you that. Don't torment yourself. Love him. And besides, can't

you see, can't you feel that he is being regenerated. He is already different. He has become another man, a different man."

"Yes, I feel that he is already being regenerated," Tarpova used to say gladly and fall asleep thinking that she would say to Gabruch to-morrow: "I love you."

She awoke in the morning, and the familiar state of inward mobilization immediately asserted itself.

"Look at us, meditate upon us," other facts and manifestations of life said to her, "and you will see that you cannot love Gabruch. Your aim of regenerating him is pure illusion and self-deception. You know perfectly well yourself the reason why you thought of this aim. You thought of it in order that you might, as soon as you could bear it no longer, deceive yourself with a quiet conscience. That's why you thought of your empty, deceitful aim."

"But why can Riabiev do as he likes?" And, on meeting Riabiev in the course of the day, Tarpova felt like setting him that question directly. But she at once recalled her conversation with Riabiev about the "new man," and she at once felt that Riabiev, at the bottom of his heart, admitted himself in the wrong, and she was afraid of convincing herself of his error. Meeting Gabruch, as she did always, alone in her room, or setting out from time to time for a stroll along the embankment or towards the theatre, Tarpova addressed him by the familiar "thou," while he called her "Natasha." She compelled him to talk of himself, and he did so willingly. Sometimes Tarpova repeated that he ought to "change," and every time after such a reminder Gabruch spoke of himself with particular readiness. "You see the sort of a man I am. Judge yourself if I can change?" he seemed to ask. But though the superficial tenor of his remark indicated that he could not change, Tarpova thought she caught in all his words an inward significance, and this inward significance gave her hope.

At those moments Tarpova took particular pains to explain to Gabruch what she herself did not really understand: the reason why a divergence in the political convictions of two persons, a divergence in their outlook on life, a difference of social blood flowing in their veins, prevented their intimacy as man and woman? And as Tarpova could not understand this

intellectually, and only felt it confusedly with her whole being, she could not explain this reasonably to Gabruch, that is, by making use of the most irresistible weapons of the mind in the shape of reasoned and logical deduction; and she was compelled to fall back on the lightest of the mind's weapons, on analogies and examples furnished by her rich imagination.

"Look," she said once during a walk when, tired, they had sat down on a granite bench on the Neva embankment. "Look at the other side of the river. Do you see it? Now imagine that all of you are on the other side, and all of us on this side; we have all gathered on this side because we are all alike; and you on the other side also because you are all alike. But we must win for ourselves that side of yours as well. But if you're over there, and I'm here, how can I . . ."

She stopped before the word "love" and looked angrily at Gabruch.

"There, you see, is the Bridge of Equality," she continued after a pause, pointing to a bridge that could be seen on the right. "Bear it in mind that you can cross over that bridge to our side.

"But one can cross over and even drive over the same bridge to the other side," Gabruch retorted.

"But that's the lower side of the river," Tarpova angrily replied. "Why should I cross over to the lower part of the river, when the centre is here? Do you feel the centre?" she was saying, now abandoning herself fully to the dictates of her imagination.

Gabruch of a sudden became thoughtful.

"The centre's with you?"

"Yes, my dear, the centre is with us, the centre!" Tarpova caught up, stressing the significance of the word "centre" with her voice and by pressing close up to Gabruch.

Gabruch could not help seeing that Tarpova's feeling was not restrained by the fear of violating the commonly accepted ethical and moral conventions—those conventions which alone were capable of providing tragedy for women of the type of his wife. Tarpova did not think of these conventions. She did not even remember that Gabruch was "married," and that there were, consequently, some obstacles to the realization of her feeling.

In the same way, it never occurred to her that the married Gabruch was, besides everything else, the chief factory engineer, and that she, the unmarried Tarpova, was the secretary of the Factory Committee and a member of the Collective Bureau. Gabruch used to say, when trying to situate Tarpova in jest, that she ought to decide on a "bi-socialist misalliance of the transitional epoch."

"Those are all trifles," Tarpova parried, and let the subject drop.

Sometimes Tarpova, taking a leap into the future, imagined Gabruch "changed," and their love consummated. But, for all that, she never tried to picture to herself how that would turn out in life, and how that would be regarded by the comrades of the Party and her colleagues, who might not credit Gabruch's "change," and, finally, how this would be regarded by Gabruch's wife?

All this "ballast" was of slight consequence to Tarpova. If she asked Gabruch "not to come to the Factory Committee," she asked out of no fear of being condemned, but simply out of a sense of delicacy towards her Committee comrades, and also because those were "work hours." Out of work hours, Tarpova used to meet the chief engineer in all circumstances, and paid no attention to the fact that their meetings might be discussed. She was afraid of only one thing—of soiling the extraordinary purity, which she, alone of them all, bore within her.

But the less Tarpova thought of all this, the more, to his own surprise, did Gabruch think of it. However much he would have liked to explain Tarpova's resistance by pure obstinacy, he was compelled to admit that something very different was guiding her. From time to time, she remembered that she could not love a man "like that," and demanded that he should "change."

He now often heard from Tarpova the word "love," grew accustomed to it, and used it himself in the sense in which it was pronounced by Tarpova. It described excellently the inactively happy state which he continually experienced when in Tarpova's company. This word was far better and more significant than the words, "the joy of life," the best of his vocabulary until he met Tarpova. But "the joy of life" had a

significance of its own for Gabruch; it served at once as an expression and justification of the eternal urge of man towards woman, of the eternal mutual urge of two different personalities. In Gabruch's mind it was not regulated by any public, family, ethical, or social norms; it flared up on the meeting of man and woman independently of the whole world; it allowed of knowing other women in secret from his wife; it served as the basis of his developed feeling for Tarpova.

Now he himself called this developed feeling "love." "Love"—this word imperceptibly supplanted in Gabruch's consciousness his former significant comprehension of the "joy of life." But the word "love" had neither sense nor content; it was an empty, unfilled word.

This empty word, nevertheless, against Gabruch's will, gave birth to a confused sensation that he had certain obligations towards Tarpova. This empty word contradicted the fundamental, reasoned thought that "people have simply confused in their minds the real relations of man and woman with those of the family." This empty word seemed to weld into unity that which, in Gabruch's opinion, was divided by the very property of human nature, that is, it comprehended in itself the conception of the "family" which is the result of the public strivings of the human personality, and of man's attraction towards woman, which has its roots in the biological depths of the personality.

The translation of that empty word into the language of the living signified that Gabruch ought to break up his life with his wife and build up another life with Tarpova. It was of this in particular that the confused sense of obligation towards Tarpova spoke.

"No," Gabruch said to himself, as soon as he had translated all these philosophical thoughts into the language of life. "My wife and I suit each other. We're a reasonable pair. I don't want any other family life. It would be comic to build up a family with Natasha."

He attempted to rid his mind of its novel thoughts. The integrity and harmony of his general outlook on life suggested to him that yielding but a single position would entail a re-examination of his entire self. More and more he lost that inner contempt towards Tarpova's constant demand to "change,"

and he found himself wavering and questioning himself: "Am I not really beginning to change?"

"To change." That meant going over to those condemned madmen. "No, never! I see clearly what to-morrow will bring, and I therefore know what to do to-day," thought Gabruch.

Sometimes when he met Tarpova, their customary rôles seemed to change, and it was his, not Tarpova's, turn to get angry and give vent to spiteful words. Some of his arguments reminded Tarpova strangely of some of Riabiev's arguments, though there was no doubt that the conclusions at which the two of them arrived from their coincident thoughts were contradictory.

Once during an interval at the theatre, when they were sitting over a cup of tea in the lobby, Gabruch declared, with a spiteful look, that the Bolshevik Party ought to be organized on the principle of a mediæval order.

"And why so?" asked Tarpova with the ironic wariness which she assumed whenever Gabruch talked in that spiteful way.

"Your Party only demands ideology of you; the religious orders used to exact the whole man from their members."

"What do you mean by the 'whole man'?" Tarpova again questioned, already guessing the answer that would follow.

Gabruch explained that the whole life of a member of a religious order, even his private life, was controlled by the rule of the order. The Party only demands the acceptance of the Party programme, and "controls" only the ideology of its members.

"But that implies 'setting an example in private life.'" Tarpova could not help recalling Riabiev's words. The bitterness with which Riabiev had uttered them was understandable in Riabiev's case, but . . . what was Gabruch getting at?

"You seem to regret it?" she said, trying to speak ironically.

"I always regret when something heroic disintegrates by its own fault," Gabruch quietly replied. "The path of your Party is the heroic path, but the Party is disintegrating because it does not exact the 'whole man' from its members."

The bell rang, and the conversation came to a natural end. Some fifteen minutes later, when the lights had gone down again, Tarpova whispered vehemently:

"Listen . . . if our Party were an order . . . I should not be sitting here beside you. . . . Isn't that so?"

A white, excited face peered closely at Gabruch out of the dark. The footlights were reflected in Tarpova's eyes, and that is why her eyes looked enormous and mad.

"Yes. Then you would not be sitting here beside me," Gabruch confessed.

There were protests from behind, and Gabruch became silent. Tarpova felt that he was searching for her hand in the dark, and she pulled her hand away.

After the theatre Gabruch accompanied Tarpova to the door of her apartment, and, as usual, wished to enter and sit for another hour, but Tarpova put him off.

"I'll explain afterwards," she said hurriedly, seeing that Gabruch was about to protest.

Tarpova felt anything but joy in her heart.

1927-29.

EVGENYI GABRILOVITCH

Evgenyi Gabrilovitch, a Proletarian writer, began publishing in 1923. But he has only lately attracted the attention of the public and the critics by his collection of stories, The Year 1930. At the debates of the first session of the new Union of Soviet Writers, Gabrilovitch's work was cited as an example of "Concrete Realism," the latest general Soviet literary slogan.

THE YEAR 1930

I

I ARRIVED in Azulino on the evening of the third of January 1930. There was a blizzard. My carriage was the last. I stumbled for a long time over the sleepers before I reached the platform. Finally I saw the brown station. The brown paint had faded. Some citizen had cut out a notice in the ice: "Comrades, 30 miles to Ufa." Here, too, hung a poster of the Volga Steamship Company. The poster depicted steamers smoking in the middle of the river. All the passengers were lounging on deck. The waves were foaming. The captain stood on the bridge.

I went into the station. Here I saw the buffet-keeper, the porters, and the cashier. It was eleven o'clock at night. Everybody felt sleepy.

A large Tartar family was sprawling over the floor of the third-class waiting-room. The men were looking round lazily, the women were combing their hair with huge metal combs. A small boy was crying. His mother was feeding him, supporting his back with the palm of her hand. The boy was wearing a pair of long satin trousers split in the middle—from back to belly—and freely displaying the child's buttocks.

I was bound for Sargar, which was off the direct road to Azulino. I had to change my train at Azulino. It turned out that the train had already departed. I had to wait for the next train until three o'clock of the following day. I went to see if the station-master could do anything for me. I had in my possession a mandate from the Middle-Volga district Collective Farm with the inscription: "For the sowing." When he had

heard me, the station-master began to shout. Banging the table with his fist, he asked who would control the trains if he had nothing better to do than think of belated passengers. I unwisely remained silent. Then, taking courage, the station-master shouted: "The louts that come bothering me here!" He threw my mandate on the floor, stamped his foot, and again picked up the mandate. Then we both remained silent. After a pause the station-master ordered the guard of a goods train bound for Sargar to take me with him.

After noting down the numbers of the trucks and making out a list of the freights, the guard accompanied me to the platform. There was a howling blizzard. The snow was falling like a crumbling wall. One could see neither the directions cut in the ice nor the posters of the steamship company.

I made out the train with difficulty. The guard found a place for me on the platform of a brake-van. The guard on duty was already sitting there, wrapped in a fur coat. The locomotive hooted, and we moved off. The wind immediately lashed me. I kept shrinking and expanding. My hands grew numb. The mountain boots I had bought in Moscow at the "Tourist" shop grew frigid. I became sleepy. I thought I was freezing and began to shake the guard. Finally, perspiring like a fat merchant, he opened out his fur coat and made room for me without a word.

Upon reflection, I began to beat a tattoo with the triple soles of my mountain boots. The guard's yellow lantern lighted me; the guard, lowering the edge of his collar, watched me, warm as a quilt himself.

The train suddenly slowed down. The guard descended grumbling from the platform. I ran towards the station. The station consisted of a two-windowed hut, pinned to the ground by snowdrifts. A stove was blazing in a dark corner. I dashed for the stove. Thawed, I noticed a telephone, a clock, a timetable, a signalling apparatus, and the station-guard in a red cap. This was Sargar—the centre of the Azulino district Collective Farm, "Dawn."

It was January of the year 1930.

"Dawn" was in a poor condition. The twenty-five thousanders¹

¹ The 25,000 "shock-workers" detailed to push forward the collectivisation of the farms.

had not yet arrived. The collective farm was run by fellows who were rather at sea where the class and economic policy of the collective movement was concerned. They had for their president Boyev, a former telegraphist.

The executive apparatus was bad. The district could not provide the farm with either agriculturalists, a book-keeper, or clerks; there weren't enough of them for the district itself. The quality of the labourers, dispatched by the central organizations for collective work in January of 1930 (*i.e.* before the Central Committee decree for the mobilization of specialists), was beneath criticism. Many of the organizations made a point of sending to the collective farms only people they had no use for themselves. It was thus that Morzine, Chlestkin, and Stupov arrived at "Dawn."

I lived with these eccentrics in the communal house. The communal house was fairly small. It had neither tables nor chairs. Chlestkin decorated the wall by his bed with photographs and post cards. On the wall hung everything that might be expected in such cases: Lia de Putti, Fogel, Ivan the Terrible after killing his son, I. P. Pavlov, hairy Eisenstein and Zhiznev. An enormous enema lay under the veterinary's bed. A pair of boots under the book-keeper's bunk.

The room had been painted with oil paint. Many objects had once upon a time hung for lengthy periods in that room. These objects had disappeared, but, torn from the walls, they left behind broad stains. On waking, we perceived the stain where the clock had been, the stains made by the chest of drawers and the curtains. There was one mark we could make neither head nor tail of. It was in the shape of a long band, greasy in the middle. The shadow of three spheres hung down to the floor. A multitude of rays went up. We disputed over it in our perplexity.

There were four of us: the book-keeper Morzine, the agriculturalist Chlestkin, the veterinary-surgeon Stupov, and myself. Three of us—the book-keeper, the agriculturalist, and the vet.—were elderly people, commandeered for Collective work by their bank and office committees. They had brought with them their rheumatisms, and one of them had an inflammation of the kidneys. The room was studded with medicine bottles. All of them slept a great deal.

Book-keeper Morzine was a bank accountant of thirty years' experience. He was busy making out an exemplary balance-sheet for the farm. He entered the acts signed by the General Commission into a book. There was an incredible quantity of these acts. They travelled in sledges, spent nights in sheds. They took in the damp. Many things melted away. Morzine read them through a magnifying glass, and, failing to decipher them, ran from table to table, begging for help. We read: "Taken from cit. Nelkin as share 1 sic. 2 h. seed-drill." Further we could not make it out at all. Loops and blots.

The agriculturalist Chlestkin had been sent from an agrarian research institute. He could present any plan, give the basis of any opinion, but he had long ago forgotten the sowing seasons, the sowing conditions, and the germination of the various cereals. When composing the plan of the spring-sowing campaign he used to run to the brigade-leaders and ask them: how many men went to the seed-drill, and how many hours a horse could work.

The vet. Stupov was the oldest of us all. He was sixty-five years of age. It was he that suffered from an inflammation of the kidneys. He used to arrive to tend horses and cows, groaning from a colic in his back. He swore, when giving a horse an enema, that he would write a complaint to the health department protesting against the infliction of work upon a sick man. He had not practised for twenty-five years. Of all maladies he only knew one well, and that was kidney disease. This he knew through and through. He knew all its powders, liquids, and ointments. He knew the gruel to be eaten by the man afflicted by the disease, the way he ought to lie, the kind of warming-pans he ought to use. He liked recounting what he knew.

Morzine, Chlestkin, Stupov, and I, lived amicably, and each one of us had something to be ashamed of.

Morzine was lazy and was ashamed of his laziness.

He used to arrive for work at the farm headquarters at eleven o'clock in the morning. He said "How do you do?" to his colleagues, took off his fur coat and cap. He sat down on a chair with a cushion. He sharpened his pencil. The morning was usually cold. Icicles hung all down the window-panes. Morzine wrote. He wasn't keen on writing. Laziness got the

upper hand. He looked round in search of that movement, that chatter, those efforts, in which activity and idleness would have been joined, like sisters, and which would have simultaneously served activity and idleness. He went out to the peasants sitting by the stove in the vestibule. He began to chatter with them. He waved a newspaper before their faces; he brought sheets of statistics into the vestibule; he swore, wagged his head, smoked, drank water. Laziness mastered him. He swore that there were buses, telephones, and universal emporiums in the town. He asserted that there would soon be undergrounds there. In his idleness he did not know what to chatter about.

The peasants dispersed at last. Morzine beheld an empty vestibule, a dirty stove, cigarette-ends, litter and paper.

He went back to his table. Here he began to put his assistant, Petrovkin, through a book-keeping examination. He asked Petrovkin where to mark down a newly born calf and where a strayed gelding. Petrovkin answered rapidly, but made mistakes.

Towards the end of the day's work, Morzine found it harder still. He could not sit still with laziness. He kept picking up his pencil. He again asked Petrovkin where to set down the calf: he was ashamed of his laziness. Back from his work, Morzine sat down on his bunk and ate. He was at Mukden in the Japanese war.

The agriculturalist, Chlestkin, was ashamed of his taste for sweets. In the long years of service at the Institute he had become accustomed to sucking sugar-candy and munching chocolate. He could not live without sweets, and was ashamed of it. Chlestkin hid his sweets from us. He ate them every now and then, in the night, and threw their paper wrappings under our beds. Sometimes Morzine would awake at those moments, creak, yawn, and groan, while Chlestkin would remain rigid as a stump, holding a cracked sweet under his tongue. He listened motionless. He was ashamed.

Dr. Stupov was ashamed of not being able to bear snoring.

We had a visitor every night—some new district delegate or village-soviet representative. As a rule, he could scarcely drag his feet with weariness. As soon as he was undressed he would collapse on a bunk and begin snoring. After chatting for a time we would follow suit. Dr. Stupov undressed, too. He lay down on his side and pretended to sleep. He even snuffled, whistled,

and snored a little. But he could not fall asleep. Our snoring, which really assumed vast proportions, gave him no peace. As soon as everybody had fallen asleep, the doctor rose from his bunk. He banged the table with a tin mug. The snoring ceased. Sighs and muttering were heard. Then a gurgling. And, finally, snoring. The doctor then lay down on his back and gazed at the ceiling. It was night. Dogs barked. A cock crowed. There was a crackling of dry wood. The East grew light. The doctor did not sleep. He still got up from time to time and banged the table with the mug. Then he went on not sleeping. There was a noise of rats. Clocks struck the hours. Cows lowed. The doctor did not sleep. The East was aflame. Chimneys smoked. Day was at hand. The snoring became less pronounced towards morning. The doctor, at last, fell asleep.

Sometimes in the nocturnal stillness the ways of the doctor and those of Chlestkin coincided. Chlestkin used to sit up in bed. He would look round, and then pull out a bag of sweets from under his pillow. And he began sucking the sweets. The doctor then feigned to snore, and tried to show himself a sound sleeper. And Chlestkin, at his ease now, smacked and smacked his lips, throwing the wrappings under other people's beds.

I was the youngest of them all. I came to the Collective Farm "Dawn" on a mission from the Bread Centre. As soon as it became known that I was a journalist, I was besieged on all sides. Peasants, delegates, co-operators, accountants, agriculturalists. They told me their troubles. They only knew three newspapers, *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and the *Volga Commune*. An account of their doings, published in any other place, ceased to be an account for them. They were affected only by things published in *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and the *Volga Commune*. Everything else seemed to them accidental and unimportant. They used to ask me: "Write to *Pravda*." But I did not write. I was not a contributor to *Pravda* or *Izvestia*, but I was ashamed to reveal the fact.

II

On the evening of the 15th January an old Tartar came to our communal house. He carried a sack slung over his shoulder. One of his eyes was all blue and black from a hefty blow. His

nose had been smashed. He went to the wash-basin and washed himself. We were sitting at that time on the doctor's flat bed and drinking tea. A samovar was hissing at our feet. The cups were standing under the bed: we were afraid of kicking them. After washing himself the old man joined us on the bed and asked for some tea. We drank a lot of tea together. Then, stretching himself on the doctor's bunk, under the shadow of the hairy Zhiznev and Eisenstein, the Tartar told us his story.

They called him Safatdin Kasimov. He lived in the village of Novyi Verig, together with a wife, two seventeen-year-old sons and five nephews. In 1927, on attaining the age of forty-nine, he decided to learn Russian grammar. His sons forbade him to learn. He then (he was forty-nine years of age) began studying in secret. His sons caught him in the act and again forbade him. But the passion for declining and muttering to himself, the great curiosity to know what was written on signs, placards, and labels, had already mastered him. He began once more (he was forty-nine years of age) running to school and inventing all sorts of excuses. His sons caught him and beat him with stools. He lay four days in bed. His kidneys had dropped from the thrashing he received. Then he gave up running to school and began learning his grammar from a book in the cowshed. He taught himself in this way for two years, and learnt to read. In 1929 Collectivization began. The village of Novyi Verig was a stronghold of *kulaks*. At the collectivization meeting only twenty farms joined the collective farm. The villagers were in an undecided frame of mind. Then Safatdin Kasimov stood up and pleaded the cause of the Collective Farm.

When he returned home his sons undressed him and, intoning prayers, gave him a hundred blows with a mooring cable. Then they threw him out into the street on the snow. He lay in the snow until morning. On the next day, having recovered from the thrashing, he went and put his name down for the Collective Farm. Learning this, his wife stopped feeding him and his sons drove him out of the hut into the pig-sty.

Upon the apportioning of duties at the farm Kasimov was appointed poultry-manager. He applied himself enthusiastically to the job. He thought of some wonderful foods. Carefully

separating the sickly from the healthy hens, Kasimov reduced the prevalence of murrain by four. Soon the murrain disappeared altogether. The poultry farm, in a word, was in a flourishing condition. But the state of affairs in Kasimov's own house was far from it.

On coming home one day Safatdin found the mullah. His sons bound Safatdin. The mullah pronounced an exorcism. The sons then asked Kasimov whether he would give up the collective farm? Kasimov said "No." They began to beat him. The mullah read another exorcism. Half an hour later they asked Kasimov whether he would give up the farm? Kasimov said "No." They began beating him with clay bricks. He fell. The mullah shouted his exorcism. A cock crowed. The evil spirits were supposed to take flight. At midnight they asked Kasimov whether he would give up the farm? He answered: "No." Then they struck him in the face with a stool and threw him out in the snow. In the morning, having hobbled over fifteen miles, he arrived at our headquarters and communal house. And that is the whole story.

As soon as we had heard it we ran to the chief of the militia. Next day Kasimov's sons and the mullah were arrested.

Kasimov was appointed manager of the farm stables. Here he displayed amazing activity. There was no fodder. The horses were starving. Many of them had to be supported by straps attached to the rafters, to prevent their falling. Kasimov began to take the thatched roofs of the barns to pieces. He hacked at those roofs with a rusty straw-cutter which he had found God knows where. He boiled huge cauldrons of water, drenched the cut roofs with boiling water, sprinkled them with salt, and the horses ate them, and ate them with pleasure. He saved the horses. He slept in the stables, he did not leave the horses alone for a moment, he managed to feed them without fodder, without money, without help. His fame spread afar. Agriculturalists from near and far came to inspect his stables and his food-mixture.

Staff-manager Boyev summoned him, thanked him, and appointed him manager of the plough-repairs workshop. This workshop was non-existent. There was only an anvil, a dented hammer, and a bellows that was as full of holes as an old drum. Kasimov sewed up the bellows and picked up the hammer. He

began to hammer, to bend and to heat red-hot. He had neither coal nor iron. He set off in the mornings in search of iron sheets and rods in the sheds. At midday he set off with a sack to the railway station. The mechanics gave him coal. In the evening he set to work. He managed to repair half a plough every night. But that was not enough. He sent in a request to the Party Collective for five Young Communists. Kasimov got hold of iron and taught the Young Communists to work and sing songs that helped them to work faster. The work made good progress. By the 5th March the workshop turned out two ploughs a day. Kasimov repaired and repaired; and he would have repaired all the ploughs brought to the workshop to the very last, but the impatient Boyev thanked him, and appointed him manager of the saddler's shop.

Here again there was nothing. There was a shed in which hung a pair of pliers and wooden rests for the horse-collars. There was neither felt nor leather. The manager Kasimov took to wandering about the village. He was now in search of nails, felt, and leather. And he found them. He found them in the most amazing places: in ditches, in stoves, under beds. They had been lying there for years, and had become so confused with the objects which they covered, over which they hung, or to which they had been nailed, that their owner no longer saw them separately and did not sense them as objects which could be separated, dusted, and given away. They had become stove, ditch, bed, as bricks become a stove, earth a ditch, mattress and iron rods a bed. Kasimov divided them off and began to repair the horse collars. Then he set to making whips and harness.

Those were anxious days. A vacillating policy, administrative inefficiency and *kulak* agitation had excited the peasants. Peasant delegates came to Sargar from all the ends of the farm in order to learn what President Boyev was doing, how he intended sowing, and how he explained the lack of fodder. The delegates brought with them declarations and petitions. Here were petitions about the coming spring, about the want of money, about repairs, about sickness, about old age, about youth, and about divorce. The delegates came from the remotest villages.

They walked night and day. They used to arrive towards evening, bringing a scribbled paper in their corn-bags. But

the peasants that sent them were not so easily satisfied. Afraid that their petitions might not arrive, that the delegates might go on a spree, fall ill, or break their legs, the peasants sent in their wake fresh delegates with like petitions. These delegates arrived the following evening. But the peasants were still anxious. For the sake of safety they sent a third lot of delegates.

A multitude of people arrived—Tartars, Mordvines, Chuvashes, Russians. There was a babel of languages. They besieged the wooden administration house. The manager's room was usually locked. The delegates pushed, stroked, and hammered this door every morning. At midday the door opened. The president came out. He was young, fair-haired, wore a blue shirt and a cap with a patent-leather peak. The delegates of five nationalities looked at him with gaping mouths. That was Boyev, whose fame had spread far and wide!

Emerging from his work-room, Boyev clambered on an enormous two-storey writing-desk so that he might see the assembled peasants and make a speech. It was hard to get up on the writing-desk. Boyev used to slither about until he was given a hand. Having climbed up, Boyev took off his cap and wiped away the perspiration. There was a hush. He spoke, demanding an immediate, hundred-per-cent. collectivization, the pooling of harness and of fallow-lands, and promising to increase the sowing area by forty per cent.

As soon as he had said all this Boyev got down from the writing-desk. Hereupon a storm of cries rose. There were shouts of: "How shall we sow?"; "We shall complain!"; "I want to, but my wife doesn't"; "Where shall we put the cows?"; "Lies!"; "Give back the horse!"; "We have fifteen old people"; "What shall we do with the children?"; "Why haven't we got a tractor?"

Boyev pushed his way towards the door. The delegates barred his way. They thrust enormous petitions into his hands; they shouted at him in five languages: "There's no tractor"; "The wife doesn't want it"; "What shall we do with the children?" The president had to use his elbows and shoulders. But the crowd finally blocked his way. Chlestkin, Morzine, and the accountants ran to his help. They had to pull him away by his shoulders, by his coat and shirt. He disappeared into the manager's office.

The delegates remained. They stood about, smoked, talked. They pushed and banged the door through which the president had disappeared. In the evening they set out on their return journey.

On the 12th of March arrived Comrade Stalin's article, "Giddiness from Success." On the 14th arrived the Central Committee decree, explaining the Party's fundamental policy in the Collective Farm question and condemning vacillation. Boyev was supplanted. The entire managing-staff of "Dawn" and the Party Collective was replaced. The new management was assumed by the twenty-five-thousander Nikanorov, by two representatives of the poor peasants, and by one middle-peasant. The Party Collective secretaryship fell to the Azulino depot worker, Zagovorov.

And on the demand of the Collective representatives they elected as their new staff-manager the former repairs-manager, the former saddlery-manager and the former stables-manager—Safatdin Kasimov.

III

Kasimov took over the management at the time of the general secessions from "Dawn." From early morning everybody started running to the management: men, women, blind men, old men, old women, epileptics, girls, boys, children. They all shouted and waved their petitions. On the 14th March the management resolved, at its very first session, to embark on a round of mass-enlightenment work. The southern region of "Dawn" fell to Kasimov's lot. I accompanied him.

We travelled from village to village. On arriving at a village Kasimov would call a meeting together in the People's House. These were the People's Houses that preserved on the walls of their smoke-stained and sooty interiors the traces of all the battles of the great spring. Here might be seen cigarette-ends that had been thrown away in December and the ragged remains of posters that had been put up in November. These were the roomy wooden houses which had provided roof, table, and lamp to all the defenders of the first Bolshevik sowing. These houses were filthy. Fields, forests—the rotted remnants of some December play—lay about on the platforms. The

winter winds of the Volga fields lashed their windows, and the stamp of joyful and protesting feet shattered them.

Crowds swarmed to the meeting. As soon as Kasimov mounted the platform hundreds of questions flew at him from all sides. It was a whirlwind, a storm, a simoom of questions. One had to be an agriculturalist, an engineer, a vet., an economist, a meteorologist, and a jurist to answer all the questions. Kasimov, the old Tartar, was none of these things. Moreover, he was not even an orator. He became entangled in words as soon as he began his opening speech. Retorts from the audience confused him so much that he shut his eyes, leant on the table, and seemed to fall asleep. There was pandemonium. People rushed towards Kasimov, pulled him about by his coat, abused him. Kasimov remained silent. Little by little the assembly quietened. It saw that it had to deal with a man who, though standing silent and with shut eyes, was yet waiting to speak. Silence came of itself. Then Kasimov, opening his eyes, called up one of the audience on to the platform. Kasimov began talking loudly to the man. He would ask the man his name and call him by it. And it was the real beginning of the meeting. Kasimov, the orator who could not speak three words, was gifted with a genial flair for personal conversation. He looked at a man, noticed the movements of his head and beard. He saw and understood his doubts, as one sees a house, a forest, a grass plot, and the answers which required one to be an economist, an engineer, or an agriculturalist, rose to his lips of themselves. It was the most penetrating form of agitation I had ever heard. The Collective Farm breathed like a human being in Kasimov's words. The farm lost its way, hurried, was astonished. The farm lost things, doubted, yawned, and looked round. The assembly, not daring to breathe, listened to this wonderful dialogue.

The meeting would continue for five, six, seven hours on end. Kasimov picked on one companion after another. In the end he always succeeded in changing the temper of the audience. When the meeting reached its seventh hour, the Collectives stood up in their places, thanked the orator, and swore to build up the farm and stop deserting.

Towards four o'clock in the morning Kasimov declared the meeting closed. At eight he set out for another.

Three weeks passed by in this way. Sometimes at night I read

newspapers to Kasimov at his request. I read him the newspaper slogans and attempted to thrash them out with him. When he heard the slogans, Kasimov became frightened: the steel inflexibility of the slogan made him go pale. Had he not committed some mistake? He became so frightened that I became frightened for him in my turn. He read the slogan, whispering: "I'm no orator." He walked about for hours, beside himself. He paced and paced, thought and thought, tramping about in his goloshes and waving his arms. And he kept muttering as he did so.

Within a few hours he grew accustomed to the thought of the slogan as he might grow accustomed to a beard, a button, or the coat of the man he was addressing. The slogan now lost things, doubted, fell ill, hurried, lost its way. That was enough. The slogan had now become palpable, part of himself.

In the course of three weeks the farm became gradually crystallized. The unstable elements had been sifted away. Genuine communities were set on foot. On the 27th March "Dawn" received a supply of fodder and bread, loaned by more prosperous collective farms, and money also arrived. The District Collective Union Agricultural Brigade arrived. Chlestkin, Morzine, and Stupov were taken off their work. In five days the Brigade made out the plans for a simple sowing campaign. The management and the Party Executive undertook the organization of labour.

What did the peasant see in "Dawn" during the first ten weeks of the spring of 1930? He saw his own vast inefficiency, he saw Boyev clambering up on the writing-desk. He heard: "Brigades," "sowing sectors, "work-tasks." All that might be learned, but could not be seen anywhere. There was much talk of Collectivization; fights even. There were disputes about it day and night, but all this was by nature fruitless.

The farm, whose fame had been spread by a hundred agitators, remained unattainable to sight, smell, touch, or taste. It was somehow spiritual and solemn as a saint; it could be fought for, but not sensed.

The bread, the forage, the plans, the labour norms, and the credits decided the matter. For the first time in ten weeks the Collectives beheld a Brigade, a Collective field and a Collective sowing plan—and saw it precisely and clearly.

The Brigade, the unbounded fields, the sowing plan, which had hitherto been but so many words—convincing, but fruitless—suddenly burst out into tobacco smoke, boots, head-scratching, and bustle. One might now see the sand which had dried on the ploughshare and the pimple on the cheek of the Collective Brigade-leader. Taste, touch, smell, and sight became active again, and this time inside the farm. That proved enough. A farm, a real collective farm now grew and strengthened with each hour.

Only one thing was lacking—an inventory of repairs. There were no smithies, and no skilled workers. It was already the first week of April and the farm's seed-drills and ploughs were lying in the shed—without screws or nuts, without coulters and without ploughshares, just as they had lain there in Boyev's time. The managers made a point of going to Azulino. But there were no skilled workers. Kasimov conscientiously sent telegrams to Samara. There were not enough skilled workers. Skilled workers did not travel about. Only a month was left till the sowing.

On the 5th of April the management decided to commandeer Kasimov to Samara to try his personal influence.

IV

He arrived in Samara late at night. The train had got behind time and was putting on speed now. Kasimov had just time to drag his sack down from the carriage when the station-guard rang the bell. The conductor whistled. The train departed.

The old man found himself on a deserted platform. The engine of a long goods train was snorting in the vicinity. An assistant mechanic was examining the wheels in the light of a bit of smoking tow. A tall youth was unhurryingly begging the mechanic to give him a lift. The mechanic refused, and the youth, throwing down his sack, lay down on the platform. Wagging his head, he pulled out of his sack a piece of bread and a herring.

Kasimov went out into the station square. A dozen or two passengers were swarming round the *izvostchiks*. There were few *izvostchiks*. Each of them could have chosen the fare he

wanted. That is why the *izvostchiks* did not budge. The passengers waved their suitcases and elbowed each other.

The old man set off on foot. Shortly afterwards he noticed an *izvostchik* in a dark side street. The *izvostchik* was fast asleep on the box. His sleepy head drooped lower and lower. Then he would start and raise his head with a jerk. But this movement was only part of his sleep. Opening his eyes, the *izvostchik* would shut them again and once more gradually let his head fall on his chest.

Wakening the *izvostchik*, Kasimov asked him to drive to an hotel. The *izvostchik* demanded two roubles. He promised to drive him to the Alhambra in Leo Tolstoy Street. Safatdin consented. They set off.

The snow was clean and bright. The moon shone. By its light Kasimov saw Leo Tolstoy Street. Its houses were small. The pavements dedicated to the portrayer of the Battle of Borodino did not seem more than a yard in width. The horse could hardly make its way through the snowdrifts dedicated to the great man.

Kasimov soon found himself at the door of the Alhambra and began ringing. A sleepy porter who had thrown a fur coat over his night-shirt opened the front door.

The old man mounted the stairs. On the second floor an accountant on duty was sleeping behind a glass door on which hung a list of regulations.

Safatdin awakened him and explained the object of his arrival. The clerk began ringing, but there was no response. They set out together in search of the attendant. They came to her room, which had been painted white. It contained a couch, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. The attendant, an old wrinkled woman, was sleeping curled up on the bed. They awakened her. Grumblingly she led Kasimov to a room.

Safatdin began to undress. The experience of many travels made him move the bed away from the wall for fear of bugs. He lay down and switched out the light. But his back, chest, and hands began itching at once. There were no bugs, but their place was taken by fleas. Safatdin could not fall asleep. He tossed from side to side, thought, and scratched himself. It was really a boring sort of night to spend in a strange town.

Next morning, at seven, he went to wash. He saw a towel, a wash-basin, and a tap, which had to be turned to the right to

make the water come. In a corner of the room he saw an enamel aperture, with water inside it, a tank overhead, and a chain hanging down with a pear-shaped handle. He looked and looked, not knowing what it was, and not understanding. That was the lavatory.

He went into the road, and turned down a side street. For the first time in his life he saw a thoroughfare, a kerb-stone, and a poster-kiosk. The side street ended. For the first time in his life Kasimov saw a boulevard, shop-signs, and a gutter. He walked to the tram stop. As he stood there he saw peasant women with their baskets, *izvostchiks*, a crowd, windows, and portfolios. He became scared. It seemed to him that he had come to this town for an eternity, that he was alone here, and that everything else had been imagined for his benefit and was volatile and unreal. He stood and stood there, shaking his head. A tram came up. Kasimov felt like going away, back to his hotel, and leaving for Sargar at once to see once more the wooden management house and his saddlery. He took a step back, but, nevertheless, entered the tram. In the tram he saw for the first time in his life the conductor's bag, a ticket-puncher, the short sitting-benches, and the illustrated "Safety First" regulations stuck on the partitions.

He arrived at the District Collective Union. People of the most varied professions and occupations were to be found here. Here were formed the brigades of agriculturalists, engineers, instructors, doctors, smiths, and accountants. The pulse of a vast concentration could be felt here throbbing perfectly distinctly behind the tables, cupboards, and inkstands. Hour by hour new forces flowed here to the villages. People came to this house from all parts of the country, were given instructions, boots, sheepskin coats, pamphlets, and then went away. By the next day they had gone. They used to go away for two or three months, for half a year, for five years.

Kasimov was told in the District Collective Union that twenty-five Workers' Repairs Brigades had been dispatched to the Azulino region. The District Collective Union had no more brigades at its disposition. Kasimov should enter his request for a brigade directly to the Workers' Union. The president advised Kasimov to apply to the Party nucleus and the manager of the machine factory, which had already sent seventeen

worker brigades to help in the sowing. Kasimov went to the machine factory. The secretary of the Party nucleus listened to his halting arguments. The secretary said that he would raise the question at lunch-time to-morrow at the general meeting of the workers. He asked Kasimov to deliver a report at that meeting. Kasimov went back to his hotel.

He began preparing for to-morrow's speech. He brought out of his bag lists of figures, lists that had been given him by the book-keeper before his departure. He read through and through these figures, whispering: "I'm no orator."

It grew dark. At six o'clock Kasimov decided to learn to-morrow's speech by heart. He took up a pen. He wrote and wrote, without getting up or looking round. Midnight struck. He sat and sat, scratching his forehead and scribbling. At three o'clock he got up from the table. He began pacing the room. He whispered, moved his fingers, waved his arms. He learnt paragraph by paragraph. He stamped up and down, pulling up his trousers and making a flapping noise with his goloshes. He muttered as he did so.

By ten o'clock in the morning he had learnt the speech. He went into the street. For the second time in his life he saw a kerb-stone, a poster-kiosk, a boulevard, shop-signs, and gutters. He walked, drove, and ran, stumbling. He arrived at the factory at eleven—an hour before the meeting. He was taken into the manager's room. He sat and sat there. He remembered very well the beginning and end of his speech. He sat and sat there, not daring to stir and repeating to himself parts of the middle, and the exclamations he had introduced into that part of his speech.

At half-past one he was called into the club. He saw a vast room, full of people. He was invited to step on to the platform. He began his speech. Although he was covered with confusion, he pronounced the opening part of the speech distinctly, but stuck in the middle. He hummed and hawed over the middle part. He made fresh attempts. He muttered loudly fragments and exclamations from the middle part, trying hard to pass them off as the middle part itself and, with a sigh, to reach the conclusion. He could not get the concluding part exactly. Then humming and hawing, he made a fresh attempt to pronounce the disastrous middle part of the speech. He began

improvising words and exclamations that recalled the original speech. With every second he wandered further from the original text. Finally, he was sucked into such a complicated vortex of words, gestures, and "hums" that he lost control of them. They might have been the middle, the beginning, or the end of the speech: here, on the platform, Kasimov was alarmed at the very thought of what they might represent. He spoke and spoke, concentrating all his efforts on "humming", waving his arms and not stopping. He spoke and spoke, thinking to himself, "Everything's lost. I'm no orator."

Nothing was lost. There were men of like conviction in the room. There was no need to call them by their names, to pull them by the lapels of their coats or by their buttons. They understood that the old man had lost his breath, had got excited and was stumped. They understood that the all-important thing was not the old man's speech, but the business that had brought him. They sat exchanging remarks, awaiting the moment when the old man would falter completely and end his speech.

When Kasimov had stumbled through the full thirty minutes allotted to him, the Party Nucleus secretary walked on the platform and said:

"Comrades, the old man's lost his breath, got excited, and stumped. Let me explain the matter."

The secretary told them of the situation at "Dawn."

"It's up to us, comrades, to put another Brigade in the field."

He pointed out that the factory had already sent out eighteen Repair Brigades and that the remaining workers were straining every nerve to keep up with the Industrial Plan.

". . . But it's up to us, comrades, to put another Brigade in the field."

The meeting voted for another Brigade for "Dawn." The Brigade's departure was appointed for the 16th of April, upon the completion of the fortnightly factory industrial work-task.

The matter was at an end. Kasimov left Samara.

The train moved out, whistling.

Damp ravines and slippery steppes could be seen from the windows. One-storeyed stations occurred at infrequent intervals on the way. Towards seven o'clock it began to drizzle and the wind blew.

"Fog," said the conductor.

A sudden thaw was setting in.

The Worker Brigade arrived on the 17th. It set to work; it worked day and night, repairing five ploughs, ten harrows, and three seed-drills every twenty-four hours and still the lightning spring thaw of 1930 proved faster than the work of the Brigade. By the 25th the time had come to go into the fields, the sun was scorching and the soil was drying up, but the inventory was not yet ready. Only separate groups took the field; and they worked slowly and half-heartedly.

The communal sowing began on the 30th, *i.e.* five days behind time. The sun scorched. The soil was drying. It was essential not only to observe the daily sowing norm, but also to make up for arrears. The work, however, did not go smoothly. The machines broke down in the fields. The men were not sharp enough. The farm was on the brink of failure. The individual sowing was in as bad a condition. The Party Collective, the management, the worker leaders, and the Worker Brigade sounded the alarm—"A break!"

On the 3rd of May arrived Worker Repair Brigades detailed from more prosperous Collective Farms. Newspaper representatives arrived. Also agriculturalists, political workers, and Young Communist groups.

Field smithies were organized: a bellows, two sacks of coal, five hammers, a cart, a grey horse, and an anvil. They began to repair the machines.

Meetings were summoned. Fifteen political experts made a round of the villages, explaining the policy of the Soviets towards the Collective Farms and the individual farmers, and explaining the nature of Boyev's vacillations. United groups of individual farmers were formed. The Medical Brigade organized crèches. Field kitchens were formed.

The *cultvan*¹ came into being. A covered cart was pulled out of a shed and set on wheels for newspapers, books, and reviews. A mobile news-sheet was taken round the villages by the Azulino band. On arriving at a village, the band struck up a march and, when the people assembled, they nailed the mobile news-sheet to the door of the village Soviet.

By the 4th of May, five days after the first alarm, the

¹ See Glossary.

norms of production had increased by forty per cent. That was not enough. The sun scorched. The soil grew drier with every hour. The sowing was still in danger of being cut short.

A fresh alarm. All to the help of the Sargar sowing! Young Communist Brigades were organized and sent into the fields. *Agitvans*¹ were sent to the fields to explain the political nature of the sowing and to agitate for an increase of speed. Azulino Party Brigades arrived. They worked in the fields after finishing their daily office work. At night, leaving the ploughs, they returned to Azulino and took up their portfolios again in the morning. *Agitvans* arrived as well, singing popular refrains ("Sow more"), and staging sketches ("Sow more!"). The singers of the Samara civic theatre sang arias ("Sow more!") standing on harrows. Journalists sat in the fields, noting down the real difficulties, real disorders, and real examples of opportunism. United shock-brigade groups were organized. Socialist emulation had begun.

The norm of everyday production rose to thirty per cent. below the Plan figures. But that was not enough. The sowing was eleven days behind time. The sun scorched. The soil dried. Every day a hundred per cent. production above norm was essential.

A fresh alarm.

Night-work was organized by the light of bonfires and lanterns. The Farm shock-brigaders, on completing their norms, went to work on the backward fields. The Party-men and Young Communists of eighteen Party-cells were set on the same work.

Journalists, artists, doctors, students, and agriculturalists were grouped in the brigades. These brigades executed odd sowing jobs, thus freeing men who could execute the fundamental task of immediate sowing.

It was difficult to recognize Sargar. Fresh and still fresh crowds of men flowed in from all sides. A field printing-press clattered away. Field-dynamos shone. The wires of field-telegraphs hung on the spring trees. There was not enough sleeping room. People slept on tables, on the floor, on the harrows. But there were not enough tables or harrows. Dirty and immovable, Sargar now roared and thundered. Unparalleled energy, gathering on all sides, inflated it. It expanded, quivering

¹ See Glossary.

and jerking like a balloon. It had been awakened, raised, and carried aloft by human arms.

By the 11th of May a ninety per cent. over-production was attained.

On the following day Kasimov set out to attend a meeting at Maximovka ("Sow more!"). On his way he stayed the night in Novyi Verig, his native village. In the night he heard the tinkle of broken glass. He opened his eyes. A kerosene lamp was burning low. In its dim light portraits and posters danced on the walls. Everything was still. A breeze blew through the broken window. Kasimov touched his cheek and saw blood and the furrow of a bullet on the polished table. Surprised, he raised himself. A shot rang out. Kasimov fell from the table. He was wounded in the back. He crawled towards the door, trying to flatten himself out and hoping that the lamp would go out. The lamp did not go out. Kasimov reached the door. He had to raise himself now to open the catch. He did not raise himself, for he expected an alarm to be sounded. There was no alarm. He raised his arm. Everything was quiet. His hand could not reach the catch. He raised his shoulders. Everything was quiet. The blood welled from his back. The lamp was burning. As he lay on the floor, Kasimov saw a waste-paper basket, a broken nib and the black sand. He raised his head. A shot rang out. Kasimov was killed.

They detained the murderer the next day. It was the son of the mullah who had been arrested for participating in the assault against Kasimov.

On the fifteenth day of the sowing, on the 14th of May, we buried Safatdin Kasimov in Novyi Verig.

We carried red banners. The band played Chopin's march. We walked with lowered heads. The mournful thunder of the band drove everybody into the streets. We went through the street, emerged into a field and came to the cemetery. Here were gathered the Collectivists from many villages. They held banners on which was written—"Death to the kulaks." "Thousands will take the place of one." We began to say farewell. I got into the queue. I moved slowly. I saw the black fields, I saw the ploughs, the tractors, and the seed-drills which had more than doubled the everyday production laid down by the Plan. I went up to Kasimov. I saw his wrinkled face, his uneven

forehead, and, taking my leave of him, I yielded my place to those behind. We then lowered the coffin into a hole and covered it over. The Tartar, Okolov, the Sargar household manager, mounted a hillock.

"Comrades," he said, "here lies a great old man. He believed in the better life. The swine murdered him. What have they achieved? Nothing. An old man has died, that's all. We are alive. The seed-drills, the harrows, and the ploughs remain. Farewell, old man. We remember you: you were short and lean. You were bashful at meetings. You faltered. You hummed and hawed. But we swear to go where you were going, in the way pointed out to us by the mighty power of the Soviets and by our great Party."

The band struck up. We dispersed.

It was dusty. The sun scorched. I sat down near the Co-operative. There was not a cloud in the sky. The newspaper representatives drove by in a cart. The field kitchens clattered by: it was ten o'clock in the morning. A shock pioneer group marched by with banners. The *cultvan* drove past. A withered peasant woman came out of a gateway and, glancing at the sky, began to pump water. The Co-operative watchman yawned. The Repairs Brigade strode past carrying their tools. An agriculturalist rode by on horseback. A breeze blew. The river splashed. Birds sang. The Samara touring troupe thundered by, kicking up a dust: it was midday, meal-time.

Genuine pathos, they say, is imperceptible. That is not true. It may be expressed in a stammer, softly, inaudibly even. Let it be so. For it thunders forth nevertheless. And when a man picks up a pen to note down what he has seen, he himself is deafened and agitated as he writes of this inaudible pathos.

I wished to compress this story. I did not wish to drag it out with politics and people on any pretext. I understand the essence of the great literature of the Five-Year Plan thus: Stop gossiping.

I wished to write this story, the story of a real man—honestly and without gossip.

An enormous labour. I set down phrase on phrase, exactly. I like snowstorms, the moon, and my supper. I like gossiping. The night and the kerosene lamp hold me firmly by the hand. How strange it is to describe ten o'clock, midday.

August 1931.

VENIAMIN KAVERIN

(*For Biographical Note, see p. 181*)

THE RETURN OF THE KIRGHIZ

"No," I said to Ashley. "It wasn't the wheels of the caterpillar tractor that crushed him to death that dark night in the fields. It was their deep enmity—they had reason to hate him. It was the enmity between a man at the end of his life and those who have just begun it. And it wasn't the plough, by chance or no, that ploughed him under the soil—it was time, that spares neither indifference nor scorn."

I don't know myself why I spoke in this lofty tone. Perhaps because it was evening and quiet, and we were walking along the roads of Glavny farm, and the lamps were reflected in the shiny, track-marked roadway as in a black mirror.

But perhaps it was because I wanted to impress the old carpenter, with his thin, kindly lips.

"It isn't a question of being at the end of his life," said Ashley.

Ashley spoke Russian very badly, almost worse than I spoke English. And he had a habit of throwing in such expressions as "rack and ruin," "ruination." All the same, we understood each other very well.

"It doesn't matter," he went on, "whether one person is born a few years before another. Do you know my friend Boistrak? You try to talk to him about farming. He says, 'Land, what's all that land to us? For us to grow grain on? All that land? Nonsense, foolishness. In a few years' time we'll sow one acre and that will give us enough grain for the whole country. And on the land that's left over, we'll build wash-houses and baths. Ruination! And on the moon we'll have a milk depot. And on Venus . . .'; and he'll go on to tell you, but softly, so that his wife can't hear, what he'd build on Venus. He's my friend, but he's a comic, a comical fellow. I often quarrel with him, very often. . . ."

I listened to Ashley with pleasure. A general favourite of Zerno State Farm, he had appeared in these parts in those

almost legendary days when the roads were still sunk in the soft, thick mud that sucked the gleaming lubricating-oil from the panting lorries, as the men in their jackboots dragged them along by means of ropes slung over their shoulders, when the street was still barely defined by the tiny raised huts rigged up with the tarpaulins in which the machinery had arrived from America.

He was one of the pioneers of the Zerno State Farm. A professional commander of the new lands. He liked living only in those places where he was the first to appear, where he was surrounded only by forests and steppes, and where the wild beasts did not know whether to be afraid of him or not. At the age of nineteen—ruination!—he finished a course at an agricultural college in Kansas, and then went to Alaska, where he bred—rack and ruin!—a new breed of pigs. His hands were large, firm, and gnarled with work, the hands of a man who could do anything—build a house, mend boots, fix up a stove.

"Boistrak was joking," I said, "but you took his words as sterling."

He looked puzzled. "Sterling silver?"

I gathered that he was thinking of real silver, fresh from the mint. I explained more accurately.

"Yes, he was joking," said Ashley, "but he was joking like a comic. There are several comics here. For instance, the gardener who laid out this park is a comic—he wants to grow eucalyptus at 39 degrees east, 49 degrees north."

It was only then that I noticed that we were now in the park. And it was not at all surprising that I had only just noticed it, for the park was of a kind that it was difficult to notice at all. The tallest tree was barely as high as a first-grade schoolboy—in fact, they all looked like schoolboys, especially when the wind began to rock their slender hands. They stood there, smooth and pliant, as though in a drill room.

"We'll come back here when they're grown," said Ashley, "but now let's get out into the steppe. The wind to-day is nice and fresh."

And sure enough it was good in the steppe and the wind was fresh. We wandered a long time away from the path; but at last we came across a mound in the darkness. A stone woman surmounted it, smooth as a funeral monument. Ashley flung his mackintosh on the grass and we sat down at her feet.

The façade of Glavny farm was now visible, the windows of the five-storey building twinkled, the main court looked like a square of blackness, the dome of the theatre seemed to balance in space, high and airy, illuminated from below; and fires glowed everywhere, like particular words sprinkled here and there over a page. It was a town, but grown so fast that there had been no time to think of a suitable name.

"Three years ago," began Ashley, "the Kirghiz camped on that spot. They are very nice people, and I became friends with a number of them. Have you ever met Kirghiz on your way to the provinces?"

"Yes," I said, "I've met Kirghiz and Tartars. But, you know, there's so little to distinguish them from other workers in the State Farm that I confess I somehow forget they are Kirghiz. Only now and then, when you see sheepskin caps on drivers, you remember that these are ancient Kirghiz grounds. Sheepskin caps and trousers tucked into fur boots seem to be the last national characteristics of the Kirghiz."

Ashley laughed.

"I'm very glad to hear you say that," he said. "A year ago they were very different from the others, very different. As different as rack and ruin."

And he told me of the return of the Kirghiz.

In the autumn of 1929 they suddenly appeared in the steppes bordering on the land of the Zlodeisky gipsy camp—one of the most distant camps.

They came in swarms, with their wives, belongings, camels, children, and houses.

Shouting, waving their stock-whips, they poured into the town, and began by driving their sheep into the garage. Along the High Street, outside the motor-works, they pitched their tents, undid their carts, and lit fires.

They were very friendly, and everything pleased them, and to everything they said, "Good, very good." There was no doubt that they looked on Glavny farm as the lawful successor of their wintering-grounds.

Short-legged, bandy-legged, they strolled about the town in their gaily-coloured coats, politely removing their caps before such persons as had beards.

There were only three such in the whole place—a shoe-black, a watchman, and a mechanic; and these the Kirghiz seized upon by main force, plied them with vodka and fed them with mutton. They must have thought they were the authorities. It is difficult to realize the respect they paid to old age.

Then their tribal poet took up his stand in front of the elevator. He sang the whole day and played on the *dombra*,¹ and the unloading of the grain took twice as long, for everyone was compelled to stand by and listen. He sang the letter of Tatyana to Oniegin, the favourite song of all Kirghiz from Semipalatinsk to Uralsk.

*I send you a letter, what need you more?
Now you may consider me a fool;
But nevertheless take pity,
Do not leave me.*

And then a long epic on the legal reform of 1868, and after that—

*The rich as a result of these quarrels became beggars
And wasted their substance in attaining office,
Trying to compensate for their expenditure
By pitilessly robbing their own children.*

He sang:

*Oh my beloved, sprinkle water before your threshold, so that
your father, when he attempts to chase me, will slip and fall.*

And the old Kirghiz squatted round him and cried, "Ai, kudaim. Ai! Ai, how he sings! Ai, what a poet!"

But what particularly annoyed everyone were the Kirghiz children. Naked, and chubby, they swarmed over the entire Farm; by day they clung to the tractors, by night they slept in the streets, for some reason or other choosing the busiest ones.

They used to find them in the grain brought from the district farms to the elevator. They tried to smoke, and invariably lit fires near the haylofts or depots of inflammable goods. They got into the stores and ate a hundred melons which were intended as a prize for the first district to complete the harvest.

¹ A kind of two-stringed guitar,

They rode barebacked about the town and would not give way to anyone. They were a real terror.

The lorry drivers were the first to crack under the strain. One of them, tired after a ten-hour day, was coming back to the base and objected to the idea of going round a tent that directly blocked his path. Of that tent there remained only a scrap of coloured blanket and a few projecting planks of shattered trellis-work. Fortunately, it was uninhabited.

Another worker, still more unnerved, stole a Kirghiz woman one night and carried her off to the farthest gipsy camp. He lived with her for three days, and then her husband came and stuck a knife between his ribs.

"She ought to have told me she was married, the bitch," the driver complained in hospital, where they sewed up his side. "But not a word. 'Good,' she says, 'good,' and rolls her eyes. How's a man to know?"

Then Ashley decided to take up the Kirghiz affair.

One morning he went to his workshop and spent a quarter of an hour with the director of the State Farm. After the conversation, he worked his usual eight hours and put on his best clothes, a hairy suit and thick socks.

Sucking his pipe, humming an American song dating from his boyhood in the 'eighties, he went down to the floor below, summoned Lurya, the librarian, from his bed, and they went together to the tent of the *aksakal*.¹

A Kirghiz, still fairly young, swarthy, in a mauve-striped gown and blue slippers, met them at the door. Three strands of hair, straight and perfumed, stuck out of his chin.

"Salem aleikum," he greeted his guests, and led them into the tent. Ashley sat down on the rug and tucked in his legs. For a few moments he remained silent. He had talked in his time with Indians, Aleutians, and Chukchans, but never with a Kirghiz.

He looked round. Embroidered rugs and mats hung on the trellis-walls, a soft blanket lay on the ground, heavy bunches of coloured ribbons hung from the vaulted roof. Cushions and clothes were placed neatly upon the chests; saddles, trappings, skins for koumiss, boxes of kitchen utensils lay in their appointed place behind the print-screen. The roof supports were red,

¹ Chief of the tribe.

the smoke-vent was green, the rugs on the floor were yellow and black. It was the home of an ambitious, secretive man, a man who held himself in great esteem.

"I am very glad," said Ashley, "to have the pleasure of greeting the head of the tribe which has honoured Zerno State Farm with its presence."

Lurya interpreted.

"I am very glad also," replied the Kirghiz in pure Russian.

They grew silent. Two women fetched in a huge steaming cauldron, placed some mutton on a flat wooden dish, and set the dish before them. The *aksakal* moistened his hands, rolling up his sleeves. Lurya gazed in horror, Ashley with unconcern. The *aksakal* fumbled in the steaming flesh. Finally, his greasy hands fetched up a sheep's head, fearsome, with bulging eyes. Politely bowing, he passed it to Ashley. Ashley tore off an ear and ate it.

"I was deeply grieved," he said, "to hear that your sheep are dying off here through lack of good pasture. Naturally, if we had been informed of your return, we would have set aside a portion of land under pasture for your flocks. In ignorance, we unfortunately ploughed up all of it, to the last acre. And now your sheep die. What a pity, oh, what a pity!"

"Yes, a great pity," the Kirghiz politely agreed.

"And the poor camels," continued Ashley. "We have no cactus here, such as they feed on in the steppe. Here they eat what they can find, and that has a most injurious effect on their health, most injurious."

"Most injurious," said the Kirghiz placidly.

Ashley ate the other ear.

"And in the meantime," he went on, "fifty versts away, by Vonyutchy Hill, there is excellent rich pasture, and your sheep will grow fat there in two weeks."

"Our bad land belongs to us," said the Kirghiz, "and other people's good land belongs to them."

They paused. An old woman, in a high-necked white jacket interwoven with gold braid, brought tea. The *aksakal* stopped her and, bending over the mutton dish, he picked out a fistful of fat and stuffed it in Ashley's mouth. Lurya turned cold with horror. Ashley shut his eyes so that he could chew more conveniently and swallowed the fat without blenching.

"Ai, what tasty fat!" he said calmly. "We want also to have such tasty fat, such tasty mutton, such tasty cheese. And such tasty *airan* to drink. And such warm, woollen gowns to walk in. And such soft cushions to sit on. We want to live well, and so we have also decided to rear sheep. . . ."

The *aksakal* stopped chewing and spat out his mouthful of meat. Then he checked himself.

"We have fine pasture, fifty versts away, by Vonyutchy Hill," said Ashley commiseratingly, "so we have decided to build a Collective Sheep-farm. The honourable *aksakal* knows what Collective Farm means?"

"Yes," murmured the Kirghiz. "A Collective means a *kstau*.¹ *Kstaus* are good. Warm for the sheep, warm for the Kazaks." Without doubt he was thinking of the garage.

"The *kstaus* here," said Ashley, "are not built for sheep, but for machines. But on the Collective, we will build real *kstaus*, a five-storey *kstau*, with baths and steam-heating. We will follow two methods, one for camels and one for machines. And we shall greatly need certain people, people who know how to rear sheep."

The Kirghiz fingered his beard, scratched himself and then ate away for some time.

At last he spoke. "I must think it over. I must think it over carefully. We must consider. The elders must be called. . . ."

Next morning they were off. Enveloped in dust-clouds, shouting, waving their whips, they moved towards Vonyutchy Hill, and in front, on a fine chestnut horse, rode Ashley—in his hairy suit and thick socks—sucking his pipe, humming a tune that was popular when he was a boy in the 'eighties. He was riding off to rear sheep. In his time he had built a house, mended boots, tamed bears, but this was the first time he had encountered sheep. Not that he was greatly disturbed. He puffed at his pipe, and spat out the dust. Every time they stopped, he took out a manual of sheep-farming from his pocket, and ran over a few pages.

Year after year the Kirghiz tribe he was now leading had travelled along the same path, stopped at the same springs and wells, and had returned to the same winter quarters, as their fathers had done before them, for centuries past. Now there

¹ Winter quarters.

was an end to their wandering. From this day their history began afresh.

"I spent six months with them," said Ashley. "They were a kindly, pleasant race. I told them how they improve the breed in Kansas, and they set about it seriously. They used to call me 'solver of sheep problems.'"

He stopped, then laughed.

"But afterwards I had to run away. They wanted me to marry a girl, the daughter of the *aksakal*—such comics! She was a very nice girl, lively and jolly. But I'm an old bachelor; it's too late in the day for me to get married. They were very sorry, but in the end they gave me this belt and I went away."

He opened his jacket and took off his belt, dark-red with engraved oval plates made of silver-gilt and clasps of tortoise shell; an ancient belt, an heirloom, perhaps, the work of a Khazarian craftsman.

It was still light when he finished his story of the return of the Kirghiz.

He told it much better than I, although he preferred the accusative case to all others, and placed the stress on any syllable, provided it wasn't the correct one.

He had finished. For a long time we sat in silence at the feet of the stone woman. Then some wild geese flashed through the sky, tearing it into three blue shreds. They flew in wedges, and they had long legs, like Gothic letters. Ashley rose and turned his head. I noticed his Adam's apple, sprinkled with a few grey hairs. With his eyes, he followed the flight of the wild geese.

But I forgot them, gazing at the stone woman, as she sat enigmatic, bent-backed, leant forward, lifting her flat, animal face. A scarecrow with an ape-like air, she sat there fearfully clutching her sides with childish fingers; and she had a receding chin, uncouth ears, and thick, sensual lips.

Ashley caught me by the hand.

"Ruination!" he cried triumphantly. "They're afraid to come down."

I raised my head. The scattered geese swept over Glavny with a cry.

The leader still flew straight. But suddenly he stopped,

dived down, then up, then wheeled about, and after him the flock.

"They didn't recognize their own home," said Ashley. "What a pity I can't talk like a goose. I would explain to them what was the matter. I would tell them where to fly. I'm sorry, very sorry they're so angry with us."

From *The Prologue*, 1931.

MICHAIL SHOLOHOV

Michail Sholohov, a Don Cossack, fought in both the Great and Civil Wars. A member of the Communist Party, he began publishing in 1925. His fame rests on his long epic of Cossack life, The Silent Don (1929-30), written with Tolstoyan realism. His second important work, Virgin Soil (1932-33), describes the life of the Cossack villages under the newly introduced Collective Farm system. With Fadeyev, he is the outstanding representative of the realistic-psychological school and the most considerable Proletarian prose writer.

VIRGIN SOIL

. . . THE short-sighted, shrunken-looking secretary of the Party District Committee sat down at the table, looked askance at Davidov, blinked his eyes and, wrinkling the sagging folds of flesh under his eyes, began reading through his documents.

Outside, the wind howled along the telegraph wires and a magpie hopped about pecking here and there on the back of a horse whose halter had been tied on to a fence. The wind ruffled the magpie's tail or lifted it on the wing, but it would settle down once more on the back of the age-worn and indifferent hack and glare triumphantly on all sides with rapacious eyes. Ragged flakes of cloud flew low over the Cossack village. At intervals the slanting rays of the sun would pierce the clouds, a tuft of sky would glow a summer blue, and the sweeping bend of the River Don, the forest beyond, the distant gorge, and the windmill on the horizon, all of which could be seen from the window, would assume the soft and provocative tones of a drawing.

"So you were held up in Rostov by illness? Well, that can't be helped. . . . The other eight twenty-five-thousanders¹ arrived three days ago. We held a meeting. They met the representatives of the Collective Farm." The secretary thoughtfully chewed his lips. "We are in a difficult situation at the moment. The collectivization percentage of the region is only 14.8. Communal Farming is more popular. The well-to-do

¹ Twenty-five-thousanders: "shock-workers" detailed to push forward collective farming.

kulaks are still in arrears with their bread supplies. We need men. Very badly! 'The Collective Farms sent in a request for forty-three labourers and they have sent only nine of you.'" A new expression came into his eyes as he looked long and searchingly into Davidov's eyes as if sizing up the man's capabilities.

"So you're a locksmith, dear comrade? V-very well! How long have you been working at the Putilovsky factory? Have a cigarette."

"Ever since the demobilization. Nine years now." Davidov held his hand out for a cigarette, and the secretary's lips flickered in a smile as he caught sight of a dim-blue tattoo mark on Davidov's wrist.

"Good man! So you were in the navy?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I noticed your anchor. . . ."

"I was young, you know . . . a greenhorn. I had myself tattooed. . . ."

"He's got eyes for things that don't concern him. He didn't watch over the Bread Supply so keenly!" Davidov thought as he pulled down his sleeve apologetically.

The secretary was silent for a while, and his meaningless smile of welcome gradually left his sickly, bloated face.

"Comrade, you will begin a big collectivization drive as District Committee delegate. Have you read the last District Committee decree? Do you know what it says? Well, then, go and tackle the Gremyatchy Village-Soviet. You'll rest later, there's no time now. A hundred per cent. collectivization drive. There's a dwarf community already in existence, but we must begin setting up giant Collective Farms. We shall send the propaganda section as soon as we organize it. In the meantime go and get the Collective Farm going, but don't be too hard on the *kulaks*. Rope in all the poor middle-peasants' farmhouses into your Collective Farm. Then establish a general sowing-fund which will serve as a basis for the 1930 Collective Farm sowing. Act cautiously. Especially with the middle-farmers. There are only three Communists in our Party-nucleus in Gremyatchy. The secretary of the cell and the chairman of the Village-Soviet are good fellows, former Red partisans, both of them." And he began chewing his lips again, and added, "With all the resulting consequences. Do you get me? They're

not very well informed politically and are open to blunders. In case of any difficulties apply to the District Committee. There's no telephone connection yet, that's a nuisance. Another thing, before you go, the secretary of the cell is a Red Army man, and doesn't mince his words; he's all corners and they're all sharp." The secretary drummed his fingers on the catch of his portfolio and, noticing that Davidov was getting up, said vivaciously:

"Wait, there's another point: send in daily reports with a horseman, and buck up the men. Go and see our chief organizer immediately, and then go. I'll tell them to get the horses ready. Make it a hundred per cent. collectivization drive. We'll judge your work by the percentage. We shall combine eighteen Village-Soviets into a giant Collective Farm. What do you think of it? A Village-Soviet Redputilovsky!" He smiled approvingly at his own comparison.

"What was that you were saying about being cautious with the *kulaks*? How am I to understand that?" Davidov asked.

"It's like this," the secretary said with a patronizing smile. "There's the *kulak* who has done his share of the Bread Supply and there's the *kulak* who's persistently fallen short. We know what to do with the second *kulak*: apply the 107th statute and that's the end of the argument. But the first is a more complicated business. How would you deal with him, I'd like to know?"

Davidov reflected. . . .

"I'd set him a new work-task."

"You're going strong! No, comrade, that won't do. It would undermine all confidence in our measures. What would the middle-farmer say? He'd say: 'That's what the Soviets do! They only lead the peasant by the nose.' Lenin taught us to consider the temper of the peasantry, and you're talking about a new work-task. That's childish, brother."

"Childish?" The blood rushed to Davidov's face. "Stalin it seems . . . made a mistake according to you, eh?"

"What's Stalin to do with it?"

"I read the speech he delivered at the Congress of the Marxist what's-their-name. . . . The land specialists, what are they called? Land-tillers, is it?"

"You mean agriculturalists?"

"Yes, that's it!"

"What about them?"

"Just look at that speech in the *Pravda*."

A *Pravda* was brought in. Davidov skimmed it eagerly with his eyes.

The secretary watched him with an expectant smile.

"Here it is. What do you think of this? . . . 'We would not permit the liquidation of the *kulak* while we favoured a moderate policy. . . .' And here's another passage. . . . 'But the situation has changed. We are now in a position to make a decisive attack against the *kulaks*, to break their resistance and to liquidate them as a class. . . .' As a class, do you get that? Then why shouldn't we set them another bread-task? Why can't we stamp them out once and for all?"

The secretary stopped smiling and looked grave.

"But it goes on to say that the poor or middle-peasant mass does the work of liquidating by joining the Collective Farms. Isn't that right? Look at it."

"That's a tall story!"

"Don't you 'story' me!" the secretary retorted, raising his voice. "Do you realize what you are proposing? Administrative measures against all *kulaks* without distinction. And you want to do this in a district where there's only a 14 per cent. collectivization and where the middle-farmer is only just making up his mind to join in Collective Farming. You'll have the shock of your life if you attempt it. That's what it means coming to a place without any knowledge of local conditions. . . ." The secretary restrained himself and added with greater reserve. "You won't get very far with opinions like that."

"What do you mean. . . .?"

"Don't excite yourself! If that measure were essential and timely, the Regional Committee would have given us a direct order to 'liquidate the *kulak*.' And we'd do it in the twinkling of an eye. The militia, all the machinery, everything would be at our disposal. . . . In the meantime, our repressive measures have to be partial, and have to be exercised through the national courts. We punish the economic *kulak*, the bread-hoarder, by applying the 107th statute."

"According to you, then, the labourers, the poor and middle-farmers, are opposed to the liquidation of the *kulak*? You think

they favour him? Why shouldn't we lead them against the *kulak*?"

The secretary shut the catch of his portfolio with a snap and said dryly:

"You take upon yourself to interpret our chief's words, but the responsibility for the district lies with the Bureau of the District Committee and myself. Kindly restrict yourself to carrying out our policy, and not one of your own. Excuse me, I have not time to argue with you. I've other business on hand." He stood up.

The blood rushed to Davidov's cheeks, but he controlled himself and said:

"I shall follow the line of the Party: and as for you, comrade, I tell you straight from the shoulder, as a worker, your policy is all wrong and politically unsound, and that's a fact!"

"I'll answer for my policy. . . . And this 'worker stuff' is a little stale, isn't it? . . ."

The telephone bell rang. The secretary picked up the receiver. People began to crowd into the room and Davidov went out.

"He's losing his sense of direction. . . . That's obvious!" he thought to himself as he walked out of the District Committee.

"I'll spend to-night reading my *Agriculturalist* again to make sure I'm not mistaken. No, I'm sure, brother, you're in the wrong! It's your patient faith has let the *kulak* thrive. I've heard you called a 'reliable man,' but you've allowed the *kulaks* to get in arrears. It's one thing to pinch them, another to nip them in the bud. Why aren't you leading the masses?" He addressed himself to the secretary, continuing his mental debate. The most convincing arguments always suggested themselves later. In the District Committee, he had in the heat of the moment seized on the first handy objection. He ought to have kept cool. He walked along, tramping through the frozen puddles and tripping over knobs of frozen cow dung in the market-place.

"A pity we broke off the argument or I would have cornered you," Davidov exclaimed aloud, but relapsed into mournful silence when he saw a passing woman smile at him.

[*The Gremyatchy Executive having decided to put into execution the extreme measures advocated by Davidov, a band of Collective Farmers is sent to liquidate the kulak Frol Damasky.*]

Andrei Razmetnov arrived with his band at Frol Damasky's when the latter was eating his midday meal with his family. At the table sat Frol himself, a small, sickly old man with a wedge-shaped beard and a torn left nostril (he had disfigured himself as a child by falling off an apple tree), his wife, a corpulent and stately old woman, his son Timothy, a lad of about twenty-two, and his daughter of marriageable age.

Timothy, who resembled his mother both in bearing and appearance, got up from the table. He wiped his full lips, shadowed by a young fluffy moustache, narrowed his impudent goggling eyes, and, with the negligence of the best village accordionist and girls' favourite, waved the visitors in:

"Make yourselves at home, dear governors."

"We haven't time to sit down." Andrei produced a list from his file. "Citizen Frol Damasky, the assembly of the poor has decreed your eviction and the confiscation of your property and cattle. So finish your meal and get out. We'll begin making an inventory of your property."

"But why? What's the meaning of this?" Frol threw his spoon down and stood up.

"We're destroying you as a *kulak* class," Demka Ushakov explained. Frol went into the outer room, creaking with his sound, leather-soled felt boots, and returned with a piece of paper.

"Here's the receipt and your own signature, Razmetnov."

"What receipt?"

"The receipt which proves that I executed my bread-task."

"Bread's nothing to do with it."

"Why am I being turned out of my house then, and why the confiscation?"

"The poor have decreed it; I already explained."

"There's no such law!" Timothy protested sharply. "This is simple robbery! Father, I'll run to the Regional Committee. Where's the saddle?"

"You can go to the Regional Committee on foot, if you like. You won't get a horse." Andrei sat down on the edge of the table and brought out pencil and paper. Frol's scarred nose turned livid and his head shook. He collapsed on the floor and lay hardly able to move his black swollen tongue.

"Sons of b-b-bitches! . . . Sons of bitches! Thieves! Murder!"

"Father, get up, for Christ's sake!" The girl burst out crying as she seized her father under the armpits.

Frol recovered, got up, stretched himself on a bench and, indifferently now, listened as Demka Ushakov and the tall, bashful Michail Ignatenok dictated to Razmetnov:

"An iron bedstead with white knobs, a sheet, three pillows, two more beds . . . wooden ones. . . ."

"A pile of dishes. Are we to enumerate them all? To the devil with them!"

"Twelve chairs, one long chair with a back. An accordeon."

"I won't give you the accordeon!" Timothy grabbed it from Demka's hands. "Don't push, squint-eye, or I'll bash your nose in!"

"I'll bash yours in so your mother won't be able to wash it."

"Give up the keys of your chests, housewife."

"Don't give them, mummy! Let them break the locks, if they have the right!"

"Have we the right to break them?" Demid the Silent thundered, coming to life. He was renowned for speaking only in cases of extreme necessity. He usually worked in silence, smoked in silence with the Cossacks when they met on feast days, sat silently through meetings, and, scarcely ever replying to questions, smiled guiltily and pathetically. For Demid the wide world was full of unnecessary and loud sounds. These brimmed life to the very edge, gave no peace even at night, and prevented one from listening to the stillness, violating that wise silence which fills both steppe and forest in the autumn. Demid did not like the bustle of everyday life. He lived in solitary state at the far end of the village, was industrious, and had no equal in strength in the whole district. But fate was unkind to him and treated him like a stepson. . . . For five years he had lived at Frol Damasky's as a labourer; he then married and set up his own farm. He had scarcely time to settle down when he was burnt out. A year later another fire left him only the charred remains of his ploughs. And soon after his wife abandoned him with the words: "I have lived two years with you and I haven't heard you say a couple of words. No, thank you, you'd better live alone! One might just as well live with a wolf in the depths of the forest. One might go crazy living such a life. I've begun talking to myself already. . . ."

And yet the woman seemed to have grown accustomed to Demid. During the first months, it is true, she cried and importuned her husband: "Demid, dear! Do talk to me. Say something!" Demid only smiled his placid, childish smile and scratched his hairy chest. But when his wife's importunity became unbearable, he said in a deep bass voice: "You're no better than a magpie!" and walked away. Rumour for some reason had it that Demid was a proud and cunning man, one of those who had all their wits about them. This was probably due to the fact that he had all his life fought shy of noisy people and of loud noise.

And that is why Andrei looked up when he heard the deafening thunder of Demid's voice.

"Have we the right?" He repeated the question, looking at Demid the Silent as if beholding him for the first time. "Of course, we have the right!"

Demid strode into the outer room with awkward steps, soiling the floor with his big muddy and ragged bast shoes. With a smile he pushed Timothy out of his way as lightly as he might a branch and, stalking past the pile of dishes which clinked plaintively at his tread, made for the chest. Squatting on all fours, he fumbled with the weighty lock. In an instant the broken lock lay upon the chest, and Arkashka Menok, staring with unconcealed amazement at Demid the Silent, exclaimed:

"There's a champion; if one only had his strength!"

Andrei could not keep up with the items. From the outer room, from the sitting-room, Demka Ushakov, Arkashka and Aunt Vassilissa, the only woman in Andrei's band, kept calling out the items in their various tones in emulation of each other:

"A woman's fur coat!"

"A sheepskin coat!"

"Three pairs of new boots and goloshes!"

"Three snips of cloth."

"Andrei! Razmetnov! There's more stuff here, chaps, than we can take away! Calico and black satin, and every kind of——"

As he made for the outer room, Andrei heard the sound of voices in the hall, the housewife's cry, and Ignatenok's argumentative voice. Andrei flung the door open.

"What's the matter here?"

With tear-stained eyes the snub-nosed daughter of the house

was howling desperately as she leaned against the door. Her mother was running up and down beside her and cackling like a hen, while Ignatenok, blushing and smiling confusedly, was pulling the girl by the tail of her skirt.

"What are you doing . . . you bastard?" Andrei, failing to see what was really going on, spluttered with rage and gave Ignatenok a shove. The latter fell over on his back, kicking up his long legs. "We're engaged in political work! Attacking the enemy, and you're running after girls! Do you want to be locked up?" . . .

"Don't jump to conclusions. Wait!" Ignatenok leapt to his feet, looking scared. "I don't want her! Running after girls! Just look, she's pulled on her ninth skirt! I won't allow it, and here you come poking your nose in."

It was only then that Andrei noticed that the girl had, under cover of the excitement, carried a bundle of her best clothes from the outer room and had already managed to put on a lot of woollen dresses. Shrinking into a corner, the girl was pulling down the hem of her dress, looking strange and unwieldy from the numerous dresses which embarrassed her movements. Her wet, red, rabbit-like eyes struck Andrei as pathetic and obnoxious. He banged the door, saying to Ignatenok:

"Don't paw her! Let her keep what she's got, but take the bundle."

The inventory of the house-property was drawing to an end.

"The keys of the warehouse!" Andrei demanded.

Frol, looking black as a charred stump, waved his hand.

"There aren't any."

"Break in," Andrei commanded Demid.

The latter strode off to the warehouse, arming himself on the way with a pole.

They had some difficulty in breaking the five-pound lock.

"Don't break too much. It's our barn now. Treat it as your own property. Easy, there!" Demka advised the sniffing Demid. Then they began to measure out the grain.

"Can't we begin sowing at once? There's the sieve," Ignatenok proposed, tipsy with joy.

They laughed him out of countenance, and bandied jokes as they measured out the heavy grain.

"We shall leave two hundred pounds or so for threshing,"

Demka Ushakov said, as he floundered knee-deep in the grain. He shovelled the grain into a corn-bin and caught handfuls of it, sifting it through his fingers.

"It's a good bullet's weight!"

"You think so? This grain's worth its weight in gold. Straight from the earth, one can see." Arkashka Menok and another lad of the band were busy in the cattle-yard. Stroking his reddish beard, Arkashka pointed to the cow-dung in which stuck grains of undigested maize.

"People like that can't help working! They live on the fat of the land. In our commune even the hay's adulterated."

The sound of vivacious voices and laughter, of a strongly seasoned word now and then, and the fragrance of grain came from the direction of the barn. Andrei made his way back to the house. The housewife and the daughter had filled a sack with pots and pans. Frol lay on a bench in his socks, like a corpse, his fingers crossed on his chest. Timothy, grown tamer, looked black hate at him and turned away to the window.

Andrei caught sight of Demid squatting down in the outer room. He was wearing Frol's new pair of leather-soled felt boots. . . . He did not see Andrei enter and went on dipping his spoon into a tin of honey; he was eating with a look of rapture, blinking his eyes, smacking his lips, and letting golden, sticky drops of honey fall on his beard. . . .

1932.

ALEXANDER BEZIMENSKY

Alexander Bezimensky was born in 1898, was educated at a gymnasium and began publishing in 1920. He has been a member of the Communist Party since 1917. He became prominent as a representative Young Communist poet in 1924, when his book of poems, That's How Life Smells, and his poem Comsomolia were published, with prefaces by Trotsky. Bezimensky's further works, published in tens of thousands of copies, were written on themes agitating the party circles. Stylistically he takes much from Mayakovsky, and his poetry is usually formal. In 1930, after his much-discussed verse play, The Shot, Bezimensky assumed the leadership of the left wing of the RAPP. For a time it seemed as if Bezimensky, who took up arms against every public evil, would become the official party poet. But his influence has considerably declined since the abolition of RAPP in 1932. His Poem About Love, published in 1933, in which he discusses Mayakovsky's suicide in relation to Bolshevik ideology, is the most typical of his later compositions.

A SONG ABOUT A MAN

THE poem I should like to write is as follows:

A man strides along the countless highways and paths of an illimitable country. The country stretches around him in sorry-looking strips of variegated crops and with the fat, perspiring body of innumerable and vast estates. The country around him reverberates with a long, drawn-out creak of wooden ploughs, with the incredible melancholy of the song sung by millions of people bent over boot-stretchers, over work-benches, over looms and clinking goblets, and with the blunt, petrified cry of "At-tention!" and the whistling of Cossack knouts.

The man strides along the countless paths of the country, and he hears a low voice:

"I, Tiunov, tell you. What is this Russia of ours? An obviously provincial state. Count these provincial capitals: three or four dozen of them. And as to the district ones, go count them, there are thousands. And that's Russia for you."

Man has the gift of comprehension. And he comprehends that the words he has heard hold a terrible truth, compounded

of a thousand abominations which ought not to exist on the earth.

Man knows how to hate. And he hates, above all, the reality which affirms the terrible temporary truth of man's provincial existence.

Man knows how to love. And he loves those, above all, who are called upon to destroy this terrible temporary truth, who are called to battle for and affirm on earth the truth of emancipated humanity, the truth called Socialism.

And when he hammered out and sharpened his mighty weapon, the word, he said:

"Everything good is man's. Everything may be spoken of beautifully, but how much better the words about the good man, the song about good people."

But there are all kinds of men. The man, striding along the countless highways and paths of the illimitable country, meets on his way thousands and thousands of people; he sees them, accepts them; but when he speaks he says that some people are the messengers of beauty and aspiration, while others are the product of evil and abomination.

And he sings the song of the falcon winging into the heights; he sings of the storm-bird and the lightning of revolution.

And he crashes down thunders of contempt on the hedgehogs, the insupportable zealots of obscurantism, and on the grebes and penguins that fear the great and emancipating storm; and he sings a song about labouring men who create the majesty of the world; about labouring men and fighters, to whom the world—the world they created—must and will belong. For they, and only they, are the good people, of whom was his speech.

The man strides on and human life seethes around him. Wars thunder, kingdoms collapse, revolutions ferment. The face of the earth is changing. Labouring men battle and conquer. The man carries his weapon—the word—and hard are the blows he crashes down on the heads of the brutes and the hedgehogs and the grebes of the old world. The man sings songs, and their words, exalting the future of labouring men and fighters—the future which they are conquering and making a reality by their innumerable exploits—ring with unbelievable strength.

This man carries his word, and the world thirsts for this word. The faces of some twist in savage hatred, and the hearts of others fill with a mighty joy. Oh, this is the greatest, the finest human and social happiness: to brim the full measure of the hatred of enemies that are enemies of humanity, and to be surrounded with the full measure of the love of friends that are bringing emancipation to humanity!

This man has not come to an end of his journeyings. He strides on, and here, to-day, he has mounted the tribune among us, the tribune of the Big Theatre in the land of the Soviets, and the entire country, along whose countless highways and paths he has stridden, no longer provincial Russia, but U.S.S.R., the land of the Proletarian dictatorship, the land of the Bolsheviks, the land of Dnieprostroys and Magnitostroys, the land of collective farms, the land of battles and victories, raises aloft his name as a banner, thundering:

"Hail, Alexei Maximovitch! Hail, our writer, Maxim Gorky!"

This poem is written, comrades, written by the life and labour of one of the most remarkable men of our times, whom we honour to-day.

We, Bolsheviks, value life. We love life—we, the Bolsheviks—leading to battle and conquest of life millions and millions of workers and toilers, who have so long been deprived of genuine life, to which they alone hold the right. The poem of our battle and labour unfolds on the pages of the world.

Oh, we are ready to fight!

On the jubilee day of our dearest friend and comrade, of our remarkable writer, let us, comrades, sing the glory of battle!

Let us glance at the world. We shall see the waves of the Proletarian seas grey with rage, the black Fascist clouds and the red lightning of the storm-bird of Revolution, laughing above the clouds, catching the note of weariness in the raging of the thunder, and convinced that the clouds will not blot out the sun! No, no; they cannot blot it out!

It is we—Bolsheviks—we, the workers of the universe, who shout in the beastly face of the bourgeoisie and in the face of the hedgehogs, grebes, and penguins, and in that of the despicable social democracy, the words of Alexei Maximovitch

Peshkov, the words of the Proletarian writer, Maxim Gorky, our words:

“Let the storm burst and rage!
... We shall do our work.”

On the jubilee day of the man who, by his life and work, has set us such an extraordinary example of ceaseless toil, on the jubilee day of the man who has glorified labouring men wherever they be, whatever their creation, whatsoever their language, let us sing the glory of labour, comrades!

And now I remember the worker Paolo, whom Alexei Maximovitch Peshkov, the writer Maxim Gorky, has depicted in one of his remarkable stories—the worker Paolo, who took part in the excavation of the Simplon Tunnel.

Paolo's father, who worked at his side, said that the earth would consume the people who had dared to descend into its depths, that the earth was invincible. And the work of the men was really terrible. The earth breathed on them with a sultry breath, crashed stones on them, and drenched them with boiling water. But the men worked on.

“Oh, signor,” said Paolo, “man knows how to work. Oh, signor, puny man, when he has a mind to work, is invincible! And, believe me, this puny man will in the end do as he wants.”

Paolo's father, who said that the earth was unconquerable, came to believe himself that the Simplon Tunnel would in the end be excavated, but died from overstrain. And he begged his son to come to his grave if the men conquered, and call out: “Father, it is done!”

And when men had attained their end, Paolo came to the grave, and, though he knew that the dead have no ears for anything, called out: “Father, it is done! It is done, father! Men have conquered!”

Comrades, let us glance at our country. Here is the north. It meets us with the expanding vastness of the White Sea canal. Here is the south. And the Vachstroy. Here the west. The Dnieprostroy has been completed. And here the east. Here stand Magnitostroy, Kuzbas, and, behind them, the model of Angarstroy. Let us sweep all this with our eyes; countless factories and mills, collective farms, institutes, and laboratories will flash on our sight. Oh, this man, this Bolshevik, knows how

to work: he is an invincible force; he will do all that he wants.

And to-day, on the day of the fortieth anniversary of the creative work of Maxim Gorky, who has given us the models of thousands of thousands of Paolos, to-day, a month and a half before the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, there rises up before me, as never before, clearly and most lifelike, the Sun of the day when we, the army of the proletariat of all countries, under the direction of the Communist Party, shall come, after crushing our enemies in the world-wide storm that will burst, and after constructing Communism, to the graves of the men fallen for us in our magnificent battle, and shall thunder out with the voice of humanity:

"It is done, comrades! Comrades, it is done! The Bolsheviki have conquered."

Pravda, 26th September 1932.

FEODOR GLADKOV

Feodor Gladkov is the son of a peasant who had turned workman.

Born in 1883, he spent his childhood and youth in poverty and struggles for existence. He took part in the revolutionary movement and was deported to the provinces, where he taught in an elementary school in Kuban. He began publishing in 1901, and was strongly influenced by Gorky and Korolenko. After the Revolution, in 1922, he began writing tales and plays. He came into prominence thanks to his novel, Cement (1926), which portrayed the Civil War and the economic restoration of the country. Cement went through 500,000 copies and was translated into many languages. His subsequent tales, The Old Dungeon, The Topsy Sun (1927), and his latest Five-Year Plan novel, Power (1933), did not enjoy the same success.

Gladkov is regarded as one of the outstanding representatives of Proletarian literature, and Soviet criticism devotes many enthusiastic articles to him. During the literary disputes of 1928-32 Gladkov took up a moderate attitude among the Communist writers.

THE RAGGED BRIGADE

UNHEARD-OF records were made on the very first day of the mass mobilization in the pit and the Power Station. Eleven hundred cubic metres of concrete were laid on the supports and buttresses by the first shift as against eight hundred provided for by the economic plan. On the left bank and on the lock the figure of the plan was exceeded by one hundred and fifty cubic metres. Far from a drop, it was a triumph. Preparatory work was proceeding on the dam to mount the scaffolding on buttresses, which had to be raised to different levels; and on the dam a large part of the Shock Brigades were engaged in rock-drilling. That night a dazzling star made its first appearance on the front of the concrete works. In the pit the removal of stones was proceeding smoothly, and the clearing-up was completed two hours before time. At first Vetokhin and Fenya, seeing there was a shortage of drillers, themselves worked with the perforators. Kolcha's brigade was transferred from the concrete to the drilling only when the work was nearing its

end, and when it was discovered that the drillers could not complete their task before the new shift. Both Fenya and Vetokhin instructed the men. In an hour's time the instruments were already pounding deafeningly and biting into the sides and floor of the pit.

Fenya handed the apparatus to Kolcha. He looked at it, fingered it, tested it, even smelled it, then laughed as if he had discovered some special hidden meaning in it.

"Well, Feyonka, you'll come then, won't you?"

She did not understand and repelled him with a glance. Then she recollected.

"Oh, yes. You're talking about the village? There's no time for that now. The real work is only just beginning."

"Come on, Feyonka. Let's go!"

"I don't know anything about the village. It makes me nervous."

"But new fronts act on me like a tonic. It's all right. This pit isn't a workshop, and in the concrete factory we worked well enough. We'll certainly not do worse here. But we'll have to go together. United forces, see? What do you think?" And he gazed at her in expectant agitation.

Fenya pulled him up short with the dogged calm of an examiner.

"Go on. Start your drill. I'm waiting to see how you manage it."

Kolcha grasped the apparatus and tightened his jaw painfully. As soon as he felt the waxen surface of the metal he became agitated, and an excited shiver ran through his body. The deafening roar of the drill hurled Fenya far away from him. A smell of hot dust rose from the burnt stone. She placed her hand on his shoulder and tickled the hair on his ear.

"Well? Work before everything, then?"

For a moment he was stunned by the ringing laughter of her eyes. "She thinks I'm a boy, a fool, an ignoramus. . . . She can do as she likes with me. . . . I'm just a weakling in her hands. . . . I'm only a workman, and she is an engineer. . . . No, Comrade Otdushina. I know my own value and can resist any temptation."

"What about it, then? Shall we go together?" she asked.

"We'll see about it later. You can go with whoever you like."

"What are you getting annoyed about, stupid? I'll go alone. I don't need you at all."

"All right then. Finished."

She turned away quickly and scrambled down over the blocks of granite to where the scattered crowds swarmed busily among the stones. She turned her head back as she went, and her little cap, perched on her curls, mocked and provoked him. It was as though an electric discharge had pierced them at one and the same moment: they both looked round, and their glances met. A hot wave of pleasure and pain surged through Kolcha's heart. He gave a deep sigh and clutched his apparatus more firmly.

. . . What was he in comparison with her? A mere nobody, an ignoramus, a clown. But she held the entire dam in her hands, and directed this strange, almost mysterious monster. . . . He was an ignoramus; naked physical toil was his only force; but she, still practically a girl, managed the most responsible part of the mighty complex attack. Yes, "to overtake and surpass." That slogan applied not only to the national economy of the country as a whole, but also personally to him, Kolcha. To overtake and surpass her, and so fuse with her, strongly and surely, in one burning whole. He would become an engineer; he would build a power station or a colossal dam somewhere in Siberia or in the Urals. His name would resound through the country, and the Proletariat in the remotest regions of Vladivostok, Archangel, Kuzbas, and Baku—to say nothing of Moscow or of the Dnieprostroy combines—would repeat his name with pride—"Oh, Kolcha? The engineer? . . . He is one of us . . . come from our ranks. . . ."

The shuddering of the apparatus racked him with a joyful paroxysm, and he felt a tension of tightly pulled strings in his body. Yes, to master knowledge! To know was to conquer, to be strong and powerful. Why is it that people like Balejev, Kryashitch, and even Tsezar could always override him, that he felt himself such a baby in their presence, and that his head grew so dizzy and confused, upsetting his balance and preventing him from looking them in the eyes? For their eyes were different, not at all like the eyes of Vasya, Senka, or Makukha; their eyes dominated, probed, and when they looked at people like himself they stared blankly, as if into space. The only eyes that

could challenge them were Miron's and Gleb's, for they met them on equal ground. But Miron's and Gleb Chumalov's eyes were different too. They had the confidence of warriors who can ignore force of knowledge in the eyes of Balejev and the engineers. One must know how to set about things, how to feel at home in the system of activity. Their eyes reflected the eyes of millions, were passionless and far-seeing. But the eyes of Balejev, Kryashitch, and Shepel were confined to their individualities; their eyes could only explore their own selves; their eyes were personal possessions. Feny'a's and Tatyana's eyes were different again: simpler and deeper, they breathed with the same life as Kolcha's. He must make sure that these other eyes should not be mysterious or avaricious; that Kolcha's future eyes should contain a whole world and penetrate into a myriad brains and hearts.

To learn! To learn with the same force, with the same enthusiasm, as they worked in pit or workshop, or as they had worked when at the works. Devil take it, his brains were in no way inferior to those of others! His energy and strength would last him another four or five years: that was all that mattered. He must reach the goal; must learn, persevere in this, that was all. In five years' time he would be stronger than Balejev and all the specialists put together, because he would have something that they lacked; he would have behind him the strength and wisdom of a mighty class marching into a boundless future.

The huge ravine seemed to exhale a burning smell of blood and sweat. On all sides was a dense thicket of heads, hands, and spines. They swarmed and surged in ant-like confusion. A babel of roars, mumblings and shouts, of bursts of laughter, of droning and howling machines, of whistling and puffing steam. . . . Green tubs laden with concrete sailed across the abyss. One soared as another dropped into the gulf. The cranes swung their sprawling arms in a mighty sweep.

Here and there on the granite boulders his boys were shuddering at their perforators. They were lost in the crowd, and could only be distinguished by an experienced eye. There was Senka pressing on his automatic drill. He was shaking as in delirium; he was grey with dust, his gipsy face looked discoloured, and he might have been for all the world an enormous gnat. He perforated the ground with his springy proboscis as if

seeking to pierce the earth-hide in search of thick, warm blood.

The tide of seasonal workers was already beginning to ebb. In the past few days a fresh flood of reinforcements had arrived, to be lost in the working multitudes and become indistinguishable among the swirls and surges of activity.

Fenya mounted the barrier and proceeded along the railway track to her office. She had to check certain figures for her section and put them in order. Back amid the hurry and scurry and the frenzy of officialdom, a constant stream of mechanics, foremen, and timekeepers came demanding explanations, arrangements, information, orders, and bringing accounts and reports, while the telephone bell rent her ears. She had to be up to date, always abreast of what was going on, resourceful, capable, and ready to give orders promptly and accurately. They had grown used to her and made great demands upon her time. They called upon her, consulted her, relied on her, and they all knew that she would come to their assistance surely and confidently, would arrange the work and make an efficient distribution of the working strength. Kryashitch consulted her more than he did Vetokhin, and always demanded information from her at meetings.

Vetokhin was a strange fellow. He had changed of late; he had grown quiet, held himself aloof, and brooded over something in his mind. His face, as always, looked raw, scorched by the sun, and manifested signs of some internal disorder. He was no longer so venomously sarcastic towards her and Shepel and the others, who, according to him, were falling into the jaws of mechanical monsters. The recent incidents with the seasonal workers dealt a sore blow to his self-esteem; the influx of the seasonal workers had to a large extent affected his section of the dam, and he could not pit himself against the country-folk, whom he had once understood, liked, and had known how to approach. They had burst from their chains and bore down threateningly upon him with howls and roars, not knowing what to do with themselves, their hands, or their helpless freedom. He had howled back at them for hours on end, had lost his voice and his head, and had impotently waved his arms. "Savages!" he cried in panic and despair. "Devils! . . ."

The concrete-workers were united in a primitive and traditional "associative" organization. They had their own customs and methods of work, their own system, and their own individual qualifications. But here he was confronting a rough and amorphous mass, a human rabble. In the past—even three years ago—these people would not have dared to act in such a high-handed way; for the concrete-workers were the leading spirit among the seasonal workers, and dictated laws of communal living and rules of conduct.

Vetokhin had begun to waver when the Shock Brigades checked the inroad of the seasonal workers. He did not distinguish Matvei's and Prokop's brigades from the general crowd; he thought they were just slackers like the rest. And when, one evening, he saw this band of peasants at work, and learnt how they were competing among themselves and with the workers' brigades, he was nonplussed, and went home at midnight stupefied and perturbed. The following day they worked as enthusiastically and harmoniously as the night before, and skilfully adapted their work to that of machines. He saw the skill with which the workers used the machines, saw how they went up to Matvei's "gang" during the break, and how they spoke, explaining to them with conviction and originality the construction of the machines, and how they arrived at a joint decision to intensify work; and he noted in amazement how the eyes of the "savages" glowed with curiosity and new-born desires.

He did not at once recall his conversation with Miron, and he felt oppressed and offended, as if Miron had crucified him on his own personal convictions. It was as if this all-powerful mechanical demon had crashed down upon him with a roar in a nightmare, while he lay nailed to his past, and had crushed him as one does a snail.

Fenya observed Vetokhin's shame and sorrow, and she showed herself discreet and affectionate towards him, and her approaches were always delicate and respectful; he would blink his eyes guiltily, and in them Fenya saw what reminded her of a flickering wind.

"He's fretting," she thought. "It is difficult to divorce one's nature. I must help him to find another dimension."

One day he failed to appear on the dam (it was after the

flooding of the pit). His absence was noticed at once by all. Perplexed, they tried to guess what could be the matter with him. Some of them jested at his expense:

"He didn't have the guts to stick it. . . . He's run away. . . ."

Some thought that he must be ill. Fenya went round to see him, and was surprised to find that he had a large family—four children and an obstreperous wife, who greeted her fractiously:

"What do you want? He's ill. Go away, please. . . ."

However, she managed to pacify the woman—who had sharply glancing, screwed-up eyes, looked pale, and who obviously keenly resented her position in life—and entered the room. Vetokhin was lying in bed, and Fenya was immediately aware of the sickening smell of alcohol. This frightened her.

"Vetokhin, dear, are you ill?"

He did not stir, and seemed to be crying noiselessly. His voice groaned with anguish.

"It's all right. I'm all muddled, as you see. . . . I wish you all success in your work. I'm done for. . . . I'm not suited to these modern times. I'm going out of circulation."

"What nonsense, Vetokhin! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Your words are an undeserved insult to me personally. I esteem your friendship highly, but you repay me with an insult. I didn't expect that from you, Vetokhin. Our work on the dam can't go forward without you. And here you're in bed. You're thinking of Kryashitch? Kryashitch is a muddle-head. Baleyev was only just saying on the dam: 'Vetokhin is a rare man for getting work done; a fine worker.'"

Vetokhin sat up on the bed with bleary eyes and seized Fenya's hand:

"Did you hear that yourself? Tell me. You're not lying? Look me in the eyes . . ."

Fenya looked at him angrily and stood up: "You've always believed my word, Vetokhin. Have I ever lied? You don't respect me."

He laughed, got up from his bed (he was in braces and bare-foot), and walked up and down the room in agitation. Tears glistened in his eyes.

"You know, Fenyusha . . . I . . . Forgive me, I have no right to call you Fenyusha . . . it came straight from my heart. . . . You must know, I believe in you more than I do in

myself. Your words echo more than the voice of Balejev. . . . Let's go. Straight away. Back to my post. . . . Thank you, thank you . . . Fenyusha. You've revived me. . . ."

Those were moving and ludicrous moments passed by Fenya and Vetokhin. After that incident he became tenderly and affectionately attached to her.

A Red soldier with a rifle, the military guard of the dam, stood alongside the manager's office. In front of him jostled a band of dirty, half-naked boys. They were shouting at him and quarrelling with exuberant impudence.

"Hey, what are you snarling at? And don't you play with your gun? Why aren't you riding it like a horse? Don't drive us away; we won't go, anyway. We're not men of the white feather brigade. Call your engineers. See what fine fellows we are! We'll get through in front of your nose and you won't see it."

"That's enough. Stand back, boys. Get back, there! No one's allowed in without a pass."

"A pass? That's a fine invention. . . . We've never bothered about papers since we were born. Come, let us in. We're going to the front. We waifs and strays have always been friends of the Red Army. . . ."

"Get out! . . . Beat it! . . . Use your feet. . . . Right about turn, march! I'll paralyse any blighter who doesn't move quick."

"But listen, mate. . . . You don't understand. . . . We haven't come courting you or to say 'How do you do.' We came to work. . . ."

Fenya stopped, listened, and then went up quickly to the Red soldier. And as she walked, self-confidently, cleaving the air with her arms, she looked elastic and light as a feather, and somehow childlike. But the backward cast of her head and the golden cap perched on the fluffy nape of her neck conveyed an impression of efficiency and care of detail.

"What's the matter, comrade?" she asked. And, without waiting for the Red soldier to reply, descended with inquisitive and merrily questioning eyes on the ragged brigade. "What do you want, boys?" she threw at them, digging her hands into the pockets of her skirt.

The Red soldier seemed not to notice her and pushed back the boys. Workers were going by on the left bank. The Red soldier knew them and followed them with his eyes.

"The old guy won't let us in. . . ." The incident amused them; they stormed merrily, unrestrainedly, jauntily. The doggedness of the Red soldier only inflamed their impudence. One urchin even smacked his hand on the stock of the rifle.

Another fellow, probably the leader, with a pock-marked face, screwed up his eyes at Fenya with the arch-cunning of a "pusher."

"I declare that this gang decided to help in the work. We mobilized ourselves on the Volga. Why the devil did we tramp a whole week from Saratov? Tell us that, please, citizeness."

"Let them through, comrade. I'll take them to the pit."

The Red soldier looked askance at Fenya, then turned his back on her and continued driving the young tramps away.

"I can't let them in without a pass. Please mind your own business, comrade."

"Excuse me, I'm work-leader here, and I'll answer for everything."

"There's no need for that, citizeness. I have my instructions. I take my orders from the captain of the guard, and I beg you not to waste my time with conversations."

"Why, you strange fellow, don't you understand——"

The Red soldier ignored her and placed himself in front of the waifs and strays, barring the way with his rifle.

"Wait a moment, boys. Don't go away. I'll ring up the captain of the guard." She went to the telephone, which was hung up in a wooden box at the side of the sentry-box. After some words in a low tone she cried to the soldier:

"Comrade, come and take the receiver."

The Red soldier put the receiver to his ear, then gloomily muttered: "All right."

He hung up the receiver and waved his hand by way of permission.

The boys surrounded Fenya and accompanied her to the dam.

"Thanks for the help. He wanted us to clear off again. . . . You're young to be in charge, aren't you? I can see by the back of your neck and your nose that you're under age."

"What nonsense! I'm an old woman."

"Ho, ho. We're old hands. You tell that to the marines."

The leader, dirty as a coal-heaver and with shining red cheeks, screwed up his eyes at her in a friendly way:

"You can lie, I see, without much trouble."

"Well, now that you've come to help, you had better choose your work."

"There's concrete. . . . And then the machines . . . and it wouldn't be a bad idea to ride on horseback. . . ."

"So they've come—the waifs and strays, the ragamuffins and criminals!"

The leader straightened himself, the puffiness disappeared as his face grew gaunt and his bashful mask melted away, and only a few burns remained on his skin, dirty blue marks that looked like bruises. And he stood there in warlike disarray.

"They call us thieves, burglars, vagabonds. . . . And yet we ragged devils have mobilized ourselves for work. . . ."

"And drifters, too. Just think, all the way from Saratov! Did you travel under the railway carriages?"

"We waifs and strays understand transport problems. Tell me, can you imagine waifs and strays without transport?"

"You're used to living like birds, boys. But just think a moment. Life's strict here."

"Strict? Hear that, mates? You just tell us how you manage here with your idiotic orders?"

"I shall take you now to another engineer, boys. She was once a waif and stray herself. . . ."

"Ho, ho! That's the stuff. That's what we like. . . . It was the same thing on the Volga. . . . They would put them to manage the foreigners. . . . As Intourist officials . . . you ought to hear them gabble away in English—Sempopolomi, chekovers—veriverikoski. . . ."

"Yes, some waifs and strays have even become writers."

"Writers? What do you mean? There are enough waif-and-stray writers to form a regiment. Every waif and stray becomes a writer. . . . That's nothing. . . . But what we want is waif-and-stray airmen. . . . That's the thing!"

"What's the difference? Drifters, or flyers?"

"Don't be funny. It's hardest of all to turn from a drifter into a flyer. They knead you like clay and make scarecrows out of you. . . ." (Laughter.)

"Idiot. The airman rules the air. . . ."

The boys arrived at the barrier and looked down into the pit, where, in a mass frenzy, crowds of workers were working away amid the stones and dust in a confused scramble. The drills roared and groaned, the derricks clanged and resounded, the trucks rumbled and clattered, the steam-engines snorted. Trains of tip-up cars and caterpillar-like files of trucks glided through the crowds towards the divisional tunnels, while others came whistling to meet them. And out of this rocky, human pit blazed up waves of burning stone and muscular heat. This surge of human waves below, within the huge confines of the circus and the metallic respiration of the machines, struck the boys as so immense and stupefying that they stopped short, transfixed with amazement, confused, and silent.

They seemed no longer to resemble young vagabonds; they had become meek, helpless boys, who knew nothing beyond their childish passions and their unhappy lot, flying hither and thither like dust on the wind and settling in heaps on the roadways. Fenya glanced at them; she felt that these children, who had been cast adrift in life, were pitiful waifs beyond the bounds of life. There was a breach in the collective system of human strength through which these children were scattered like grain from a sack and, falling on the roadway, were swallowed up in the dirt and crushed by wheels, and only a few of them, by their own exertions, by the strength of their will, broke through into life and put out healthy, vigorous shoots. What strength, tenacity, and ability were required to overcome all obstacles and horrors, and to burn with a bright, eager flame. There was Tatyana. She was unshakable; she looked on life and men with tranquil wisdom, and nothing could surprise her now. She knew her path and nothing could make her falter. And Tatyana sometimes regarded her, Fenya, not so much as a friend as a child, unaware of something of the utmost importance in life and without which there was no true knowledge of reality. This offended and angered Fenya, but Tatyana laughed silently and looked at her in a sly, oblique kind of way, with caressing condescension and pity. And yet another thing surprised and hurt Fenya. Tatyana never told her about her vagrant life. Fenya explained this away by her

extreme pride: she did not wish for the sympathy and compassion even of her closest friends.

From the barrier above, where the cranes raised their latticed beams and shuddered with mechanical tension, the pit, in its rocky depth, seemed to live with the teeming, physical life of human multitudes.

"Look, look!" cried one of the boys. "It's like bees round a honeycomb."

"Well, that's worth something!"

The pit was alive. It breathed, stirred, ran warm with blood. And Fenya somehow, altogether unexpectedly, became aware of splash and stir below which she had never thought of before; she realized that she was taking part, together with these people, in a great work; that she, a mere girl, with her Young Communist's habits, was building this hydro-giant as no mere dam, over a mile long and seventy yards high, but was raising the edifice of a new world which would live for all time and create a new race of men, free, daring, and audacious. Yes, she, the small, impetuous Fenya.

The stairs trembled with pounding feet. The boys, obedient and awed, trailed down after Fenya in single file. When they reached the bottom they clustered together again, and Fenya was touched to see them clutch at her dress like children. They gazed in eager silence on all sides: at the men carrying stones; at the rubble, ropes, and wheelbarrows; at the spitting drills; at the stones sailing above the ranks of stooping bodies (suppose they fell down!); and at the tubs sailing like ships over the scaffolding. . . . Then a huge four-petalled flower blossomed out, suspended on a gossamer frame, and swooped down upon a heap of fine rubble. The workmen followed the boys with their eyes in silent surprise, and some of them called out, laughing: "Hey, Otdushina, who are the heroes you're bringing? Is that the ragged brigade?" Or: "Hurrah, the army's come! The waifs are here to lend a hand."

They found Tatyana among a crowd of people near the new scaffolding, built on the monoliths of the central islet and grounded on the clean granite base of the pit. The foremen thronged round, bombarding her with hasty questions. She gave short instructions, quickly and confidently.

"Look, Tatyana, these boys have come for work. You will be able to talk to them better than I."

Tatyana cast a fleeting, perfunctory glance at the boys, and nodded her head to Fenya.

"All right. Leave them to me."

Then turning frigidly to the boys, she engaged the fellow who was marching alongside of Fenya. She frowned, then suddenly burst out laughing.

"What's your name?"

"Sytych!" The boy scowled and, for some reason or other, raised, then shrugged, his shoulders. Tatyana seemed not to notice Sytych's playful gesture, and asked in a jauntily coarse and familiar tone that struck strangely on Fenya's ear:

"Had any grub?"

"We had a bite earlier on in the day."

"Supper will be ready in an hour. The restaurant is on the bank. Take this for all of you, and they'll give you something to eat." She produced a paper from her pocket and handed it to Sytych. "The hostel is on the left bank. They'll give you some soap there, and see you all have a hot shower-bath; it's next door to the hostel. I'll come along later. To-morrow morning come back here and they'll give you a metal check. Then I'll give you work. For the time being you'll be on these pulleys, sorting and cleaning. Afterwards you'll work with concrete."

And suddenly continuing in a quieter, friendly tone: "When were you last locked up?"

Sytych wrinkled his brow and played on the wrinkles like a concertina.

"In Rostov! I managed to escape. . . . There was another time, in Novorossisk. We had a feast in the colony vineyards. . . ."

"Did you get into a row?"

"Discipline, that's what was wrong. They were fond of ordering us about. And they wouldn't give us any vodka. We broke into the cellar, got drunk, and made off with what we could find."

"So that's what you did. . . . Now you'll have to deal with me, Sytych. I was in your shoes, once. Is that red-haired crow still alive in Novorossisk?"

"Ha! We ducked her in the water one night and then brought her back to life. She gasped like a fish. She was only in bed for three days after that and we fed her on grapes."

There was a burst of laughter. Tatyana waved her hand.

"Nikitin!"

The foreman came running up, clambering over stones; he was jovial, but looked limp and had tired shoulders.

"What is it, Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"Take these fellows; they're a fine lot. I'll answer for them. They'll be first-rate. Let them sort and clean the pulleys. Don't yell at them or order them about. You may rely on them as on myself."

Fenya hastened off to the gangway, smiling to herself. Dear Tatyana, how she could adapt herself to different rôles without losing her real nature.

All the responsible workers, the members of the Party Committee, all the members of the Workers' Committee were hard at work. Even Balejev and the bearded Shlippe came out as ordinary workers; Strizhevsky, in his clean collar, necktie, and shining boots, was the only man who seemed superfluous in the brigade of engineers.

Vikenty Mihailovitch chaffed him coarsely but genially:

"Give a hand, Evgenyi Grigorievitch, give a hand. . . . Your boots and necktie are working clothes fit only for government officials. Where was the technical intelligentsia when Adam delved and Eve span?"

"God in heaven was the first engineer. He built the earth and the sky."

"Your jokes are poor and long-winded, Shlippe. Stick your beard inside your collar! It keeps hitting me in the eye and prevents me from seeing the world."

Shlippe and Strizhevsky smiled with embarrassment; they felt uncomfortable and degraded in the company of mere workmen and technicians. They felt as if they had been stripped of their clothes and driven naked among people whom they had been accustomed to command and dominate from unattainable heights.

Several brigades of engineers were at work; among them were the hydro-technicians, the constructors, the railway engineers,

the electro-technicians. . . . Baleyev, Shlippe, and Strizhevsky were working in Barannikov's brigade, Kryashitch in Shagaev's brigade. In the latter, Mitrokhin was bustling about ecstatically, bursting with an old man's thirst for youth; Borzya conveyed stones pensively, with sad reticence, inward conviction, and unshakable calm. There were throngs of gay and friendly youths, and it seemed to Mitrokhin that this made hard work just as much a game as football. It was pleasant to see how the fellows knit their wet, half-naked bodies together in unison as they bent over the piled granite and rolled the blocks over on their side to the accompaniment of shouts and cheers. Mitrokhin nimbly threw himself into their ranks and joined in the shouting, straining himself and feeling that their young blood was rushing through his veins. He went off his head with joy when they mischievously shouted to him:

"Heave, there; heave, Comrade Mitrokhin. Shift it, dad. We'll move it with your help."

And Mitrokhin shouted back, straining with the effort: "At it, boys. Keep time, boys. Roll it, lads. . . ."

Kryashitch set to work violently and painfully. He could not master or match these people's strength. He must go on, like a prisoner, and suffer in this constrained, silly crush. However, he had already overcome one difficult stage of his past, to which a painful path had led him. He had proved his integrity and honesty to these people. Indeed, there was nothing to prove; he had nothing to hide, his actions spoke for themselves. But this mobilization of engineers was like a game. What was it? A futile experiment on the part of organizers upon the personality of every one of these members of the high intelligentsia, including himself, Kryashitch. Had they no way of distinguishing the functions of a seasonal worker and an engineer? Amazing spectacle! The Russian technical intelligentsia, with its high reputation, was rolling stones like mere labourers, was loading and pushing trucks. . . . Shagaev gave him a sly wink, and Kryashitch felt that he could see through him and was laughing at his silent protest. And that disturbed him.

"You don't seem to be exactly burning with enthusiasm for toil, Comrade Kryashitch," said Ignatytych, with affectionate malice. "Are you ill? You're free to do as you like, you know."

Yes, he was free to do as he liked! He could go away at any time, but just let him try to do it. . . . He would be followed by silent looks: they would perhaps pretend not to notice his departure at all, but the silence in their eyes would be more terrible than the most stunning blow. Kryashitch answered coldly, between his teeth:

"Thanks for your concern. But, between ourselves, you can go to the devil."

"No. I am as much surprised as you are. Why was it I and not you who organized the brigade? You're boss here, you —— so why be so unnecessarily modest?"

Kryashitch did not answer Shagaev, and a malevolent flame flickered in his eye. Shagaev covered his confusion with a laugh, then whispered in a hot breath, close behind Kryashitch's neck:

"You're losing your dignity, Nicolai Nicolaievitch, and becoming ridiculous. You haven't mastered your personality very successfully; it won't obey you. . . ."

Kryashitch trembled as if from an electric shock. Shagaev's whisper had touched him to the quick. It was true; his suffering was due, not to someone stealing his personality, but to the fact that he himself could not maintain his previous personality in all its pride. He was, in fact, weak-willed and lacking in individuality, and he had become accustomed to this lack from his earliest years. He had always felt himself a prisoner because certain events had called forth his pride, which was, actually, non-existent. It was merely a pose, a corporate mask.

He glanced at Borzya and Mitrokhin, who were pushing a block of stone together. Their faces were swollen with blood, while their eyes were clammy with the strain. But in their straining there was so much passionate desire to move the stone from its place that Kryashitch could not tear his eyes away from them.

"What's the matter with them? Why are they overstraining themselves? One of them is at death's door and yet he blusters and boils. The other is a weak-chested mystic. . . ."

Borzya caught Kryashitch's glance and smiled challengingly at him from behind his stone. It was funny to see these two old men enthusiastically heaving shoulder to shoulder against this broken fragment of rock.

"Come here, Nicolai Nicolaievitch! The young folk are eager enough. They have all the competition they want. But we old folks should work without any overwhelming heroism. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Nicolai Nicolaievitch, that's right, old man." Mitrokhin, smiling beseechingly, wiped the sweat from his face with both hands. "You're master here; a hero. Come here, just come here. Help us, there's a good fellow."

Borzya looked at him sadly and with indulgent wisdom, waited for some significant and notable reply, some promise that Kryashitch had not yet fulfilled. And Kryashitch felt that Borzya understood him, was lovingly watching over him, and that it was impossible to hide from this kindly man or conceal his rebellious thoughts from him. He, too, was expecting a demonstration of pride and strength from him.

He came up to these two Sisyphe, and humbly, shoulder to shoulder, began to roll the stone with them.

"There, Nicolai Nicolaievitch," Borzya panted with exertion. "Here we are, Tikhon Egorivitch and I, putting all our strength into your Egyptian monument. Splendid! When everything is finished we shall proudly admire this great temple of human toil and say: 'There is a little of our selves in that, too, of our efforts and inspiration.'"

"Splendid, Pyotr Ivanitch," Mitrokhin congratulated. "Exactly. Your words are full of spiritual enthusiasm, marvellous words. What a great and fortunate man you are, Nicolai Nicolaievitch."

But Kryashitch was putting out all his strength in his effort to relieve the two old men in their task. Without noticing it, he fell into the swing of the work, grew warm, his heart beat jerkily and elastically, and a physical joy swept over him. The blood thickened and sang in his ears, youth flowed into his muscles, everything became strangely interesting and lost all repulsion, even the sky seemed to sing a dear, long-forgotten song. There was a moment when he felt with amazement that he was working with satisfaction, and that he was, in that instant, another person, in no way resembling the Kryashitch who had been fastidiously putting on airs an hour ago. And, indeed, while working he had lost all sense of time.

They struck up a competition with Barannikov's brigade,

and Kryazhitch found it an amusing diversion to look at Strizhevsky as on a foppish old nobleman unable to get used to his rôle of quarryman. He looked all dishevelled and downcast; Balejev, on the contrary, was fresh and alert. He had grown younger and simpler, and his manner with Strizhevsky was now rude and familiar.

"Come on, come on, Evgenyi Grigorievitch. A bit more energy, please. It's very healthy to reduce one's fat. Just bear it in mind, you're only an ordinary workman here. Barannikov's sly; he appreciates every exertion you make. . . ."

Strizhevsky was silent as a corpse.

Balejev noticed Kryashitch and threatened him with his fist. "Nicolai Nicolaievitch, that's disgusting. You're swindling. You're nearer to the derrick than we are. And also you've got that renowned crook, Shagaev. He's picking small stones for you, while we're pushing whole mountains."

Shagaev cried back: "There's no tricking you, Vikenty Mihailovitch; the very devil couldn't do it. Just look at some of the people you've got; people with the most brilliant economic and organizing experience, regular academicians."

Kryashitch found this rivalry an exhilarating game. Vetokhin, who was working in their brigade, was still wearing his mackintosh. Running with sweat, he was rolling stones like an ox. Kryashitch was the first to come up to him during the break and clap him on the shoulder and ask him for a cigarette, for he had left his own at home.

"Mine aren't much good, I'm afraid, Nicolai Nicolaievitch." Confused, Vetokhin hastened to offer his crumpled packet.

"That's all right, Vetokhin, thanks; I like smoking them. Why the devil are you wearing your mackintosh? Cast off your sackcloth—you're absolutely soaking."

"How can I, Nicolai Nicolaievitch? I'm used to it. Without it I'd be like Samson without his hair."

"What a strange fellow! How can you be so foolish?"

Kryashitch was dripping with sweat. He threw off his jacket and his cap and grew unusually simple. Wiping the hot slime from his face with his hand, he cast his eyes round the pit, and, for the first time, felt the all-tenseness of its life: people were stirring everywhere in dense crowds with bent backs, couples moved along in single file pushing barrows,

and groups of men clustered near the trucks, cranes, and derricks.

"Things are going well, aren't they, Vetokhin?"

"Yes. It's enthusiasm that matters, impetuosity, you understand. . . . Why do the seasonal workers mark time like tortoises? It's because they have no personal interest in the work. And, besides, the machines are beginning to get on their nerves. They can only try for things that buzz like flies under their very nose; their interests are all tiny ones. . . ."

And once again, in that instant, Kryashitch found something new and sympathetic in Vetokhin that he had not known before.

"He's a decent sort of a fellow, after all."

Arch, bright looks suddenly appeared in Vetokhin's eyes. "I've an idea, Nicolai Nicolaievitch. Why not use the derricks? . . . Set them in parallel lines. . . . We can then pull the stones along with ropes. The derricks are not all being used. . . ."

"You're right, Vetokhin! A splendid idea! Fancy not thinking of that before!"

Then Balejev gave a shrill, triumphant cry: "Hey, you fellows. Having a smoke, are you? All right, all right. . . . I congratulate you. Smoke away and waste your time. . . ."

Kryashitch started and pulled himself together. He hastily threw his cigarette down and stamped on it with his foot. Vetokhin spat on his and looked regretfully at it as he flung it away. The old men, together with the youths and Shagaev, climbed on top of the large mound and stared at them round-eyed, then shouted in chorus while Mitrokhin piped in an aged falsetto:

"Ignaty Ignatytych."

Kryashitch waved to him, and Shagaev noticed that Kryashitch had somehow changed and that it was no longer advisable to jest with him.

"Give a hand here, Ignaty Ignatytych," Kryashitch cried. "We are going to stagger the Balejevites; we're going to use the rope for hauling the stones to the barrier. It's Vetokhin's idea. They won't notice it at once. Vetokhin will fix it up in a moment. We'll work with our row of derricks."

The others, indeed, failed at first to notice Vetokhin's activity at the derricks, but when he and the seasonal workers tied the

rope to the stones and a group on the left did the same, there was a commotion in Barannikov's brigade. The first stone slid slowly between the others and bumped across the rocky bottom. Near by, another stone slid slowly along. Mitrokhin's weary but joyous face lit up as he laughed and shook his limp hand with enthusiasm. The young men howled discordantly and gazed triumphantly at the Baleyevites. Kryashitch experienced a new and genuine gladness, and also a strange, warm, and causeless joy. He tore off his cap and shook it at Baleyev.

"Vikenty Mihailovitch, you're lagging disgracefully behind. Shame on you. Come here and capitulate. We've won the battle."

Baleyev rapped out a threatening challenge by way of reply, straightened himself, and thrust his hands in his pockets.

"I always said, devil take it. . . . I always said that Kryashitch was concealing his real nature. I declared that he was deceiving and mocking at us. And so he is. They're a lot of swindlers . . . but I won't give in. I'll pay you back for that."

He ran off to the derrick and snatched up Barannikov on the way. They skipped over the uneven bottom, and both shouted loudly to the haulage-operator.

Shagaev gave Kryashitch a sly wink, squeezed his elbow, and said to him with friendly intimacy: "That's the way to build Socialism without overstrain. As they say: give us simple answers to our accursed questions. Let us live, Nicolai Nicolaievitch, without inward struggles."

Kryashitch noticed with satisfaction that he was no longer angry with Shagaev and that Shagaev was proving himself a gay and sympathetic friend.

"What's happened to me?" he wondered, looking round. "The world and the people in it seem different to me now. I seem to be acquiring a taste for this rough work."

He felt that his body had up to then been hopelessly poisoned, but that now fresh, healthy blood was flowing into his veins, and his body and brain were throbbing with new, joyful, and vigorous life. By some strange association, Bublikov's swarthy face, with its narcotic-drugged eyes, came into his mind, and he shuddered with hate and revulsion.

ALEXANDER FADEYEV

Alexander Fadeyev, the son of a phlebotomist, was born in 1901, and spent his childhood and youth in the Far East, in the Ussuryisky region. He was educated at a commercial school. From 1918 he began working in the Communist Party, and took part in the Partisan Movement against Koltchak. He was wounded in the Civil War, and then did active work as a Party member. His first work, a tale, Against the Current, was written in 1923, and, in 1926, he published his first novel, The Rout (translated into English as The Nineteen), which immediately brought him into prominence. Fadeyev's second and larger novel, The Last of the Udegs, has been appearing in sections since 1928. It represents an ambitious attempt to study the mainsprings of bourgeois family life in a background of civil war and more primitive Asiatic communities. Fadeyev is one of the most outstanding of Proletarian writers. He plays an important part in literary polemics and writes numerous articles on theoretical questions touching Soviet literature and the Party literary policy. Fadeyev, in his work and theory, defends the thesis of the "living man," as against the abstract, and shows himself a disciple of the Tolstoyan artistic method.

THE BANDITS

GLADKY's detachment had now been already three days forging its way up the River Malaza.

The country they were passing through was exceptionally wild and deserted. The sun scarcely pierced the thick mat of foliage. They came on fresh lairs of bears hard by the very track. On the muddy, reed-infested forest-pools broods of ducks swam idly about; and it was easy to poke about in the sedge and find nests with the fluffy little ducklings still in them.

A man with two horses had quite recently passed that way. It was clear he knew his road well. Gladky kept his men following the trail.

He pushed on ahead to study the tracks, and Senya dawdled a little with the platoon, so that he caught up with some difficulty.

He straightened his back when Senya came up. His eagle eyes flashed swiftly over Senya.

"Don't you see?" he said. "It's quite obvious this isn't the first time he's been this way! . . ."

"Who's been?" Senya asked inattentively.

"How can I tell you who it is? The man whose tracks we're following. . . ."

"Oh, you and your eternal tracks, you old boob," thought Senya.

He felt a rather mournful sort of pride. His attitude towards his commander was that rather whimsical—but at bottom very tender—sort of devotion that weaklings whose mental organization is complicated often feel for those who are physically healthy, but who find thinking a burden.

"And a lot of good they do you!" he said.

"Yeh . . .?" Gladky drawled, mocking him. "And what would you say if there was a smell of smoke, just to have your opinion, you know?"

"Smoke?"

But Senya sniffed the air a little more attentively. Indeed there was a faint but scarcely perceptible smell of burning acerose leaves.

"Well, you're right; the woods are afire somewhere," he said a little thoughtfully.

From time to time they halted to wait for the men to come up; and then, as soon as the heads of the leaders of the files showed through the undergrowth, they disappeared ahead once more. Dusk was already coming on: the shadows were deepening, a lilac tint creeping into them; and the undergrowth was full of the twilight uneasiness of birds.

Then, suddenly, round a bend in the river, the track broke off—the river swerved away to the right—and a large clearing, lit by the setting sun, opened before Senya and Gladky. The clearing was swarming with men. Down the centre of it stretched a long shanty, freshly built of timbers still oozing with resin, only just covered with a roofing of bark.

At the entrance to this shanty a small fire was smoking faintly—the smoke was curling up and clinging in bluish sheets among the branches of the surrounding trees. A great number of Chinese, in dirty white shirts and blue blouses, criss-crossed with cloth bandoliers, were squatting in absolute silence round their piled rifles. Some of them were deep in their pipes,

others had stripped to the waist and had spread their shirts over their knees, delousing. Two pipe-smokers were at the door of the shed. Up to the left, on a small rise, stood two tethered horses.

For a moment Gladky and Curly Senya were too surprised even to feel alarm, and they went on a few more paces before they stopped. Neither did the occupants of the clearing show any surprise. But a second later the two men at the door of the shed flung down their pipes and sprang apart, and, frozen stiff, one on each side of the fire, with their guns, flashed out of holsters, pointed at the two intruders. Gladky and Curly (who had turned deathly pale) did the same.

In an instant the glade woke up, the pyramids of rifles vanished. Their muzzles were all pointing at the intruders; while the Reds as they came up behind uttered cries of alarm and surprise, unslung their rifles, and drew round their commanders in a horseshoe. There was a hushed command. The undergrowth to the left rustled and crashed—and the Reds had surrounded the clearing.

For some moments the two parties stood in their threatening pose; rifles pointing; not a word spoken.

The appearance of one man, carrying a revolver, the man exactly opposite him, was so extraordinary that Senya would never forget it.

It was a man well on in years, with sparse grey eyebrows. He was dressed in a shabby Chinese officer's uniform without epaulettes or tabs; and he stood so solid that it looked as if his bandy legs had taken root in the soil. High cheek-bones, a large scar on the chin, eyes that did not flicker, eyes with red lids and no eyelashes, and tears constantly trickling from them down his cheeks, combined to express, at one and the same time, something painfully pitiful and something cruelly dispassionate.

His weeping eyes looked Senya up and down for some seconds, and seemed to reflect him in every way without taking him in at all, and then they slid aside on to Gladky, and then there was a faint quiver of the outer ends of his eyebrows.

"You, Anton?" he asked, in a small, insidious voice with a faint trace of Chinese accent.

"Li-fou?" came Gladky's hoarse response.

And as one man they both lowered their guns. With an audible sigh and rustle the whole clearing did the same.

"Well, you're the last man I expected to fall in with, I must say!" Gladky said wryly, and he stepped forward to Li-fou.

Li-fou stepped a few paces towards him. Gladky stretched out his great sunburned paw. Li-fou took it between the fingers of both hands and shook it perfunctorily, feebly, like an old man.

"I don't think either of us expect it," he answered. He pronounced his Russian carefully, accurately. "Please make yourself quite at home. . . ."

He swung quickly round to the corpulent, long-armed Chinese who had been sitting with him at the barrack door. That man then returned his gun to its holster and went over to the men. He waved his hand about the clearing and called out something in a commanding way in a thin, throaty voice.

"My second - in - command. He called Ka-say," Li-fou explained.

"And this is my good comrade, Curly Senya," Gladky said, and pointed at Senya, who had now quite got over his first alarm, and even forgotten how alarmed he had been, and was busy examining the bandits with a mournful sort of intentness.

The bandits now collected their bandoliers and shorts from the grass and withdrew to the farther half of the clearing. A number of men squatted down by the fire in front of the barrack. On both sides; that is, to the right, towards the river, and to the left, towards the slight rise where the horses were tethered, a number of the bandits settled down in tiny groups, making a sort of chain of guards across the open space.

On a sign from Gladky the Reds threw off their packs and gladly scattered, shouting and laughing, over the space cleared for them; but they, too, formed a sort of barrier line, so that there was a long strip of no-man's-land between the two bodies.

In the centre of that strip stood Gladky, Li-fou, and Senya, and eyed each other with distant politeness.

"Hallo, there! Vanya!" yelled one of the men somewhere behind Senya, "they've palled-up with the bandits!" The man did not seem to care whether or no the bandits heard him, and evidently did not count them as people.

"Pals, indeed," came a deep bass voice, "filth, scum, you can't pal-up with them," and he spat in contempt. . . .

"Dainty, are y'?" the first one gurgled, "take that! . . . and

there was the dull sound of a pack coming down on the bass-speaker's head.

"Shurrup, you fool," said the sufferer quietly.

Senya was annoyed, and turned round. It was Ivan Lozhkin, the driller, a happy-go-lucky, care-free fellow that the detachment knew as "Judge," and his nephew, who had been under him at the mine, one Mitya Lozhkin, a self-opinionated, surly young cub, with a pair of enormous ears.

"Your men are very jolly," said Li-fou in his careful way, and he smiled; but only his mouth smiled. "That is very good. It is better be happy than rich, what? . . ."

He reached in one of the pockets of his tunic for a handkerchief and wiped away the tears which were sluggishly trickling down his cheeks. He looked at Senya with that immobile, steady, mournful look of his, and added:

"We have no jolly boys. . . ."

A glint of childish and cruel curiosity, like that in anybody torturing an animal, came into his eyes for an instant, but his features as quickly turned back to stone. He put his handkerchief away.

"I suppose you don't happen to know who it can have been went this way with a pair of horses?" Gladky asked, and he squinted sideways at the two horses tethered on the rise.

"That be one of my men," Li-fou said evasively. "Please make yourselves quite at home. . . ."

He bowed politely and hobbled away into his barrack. On the way he deliberately kicked away one of his men who didn't happen to be spry enough in getting out of his road.

It was Senya's first contact with the bandits, though he had heard enough about them, especially about Li-fou. There had been a lot of talk in the villages, and at the mines, about his descents on Korean villages or native settlements. He was famous for his ability to be everywhere at once and never be caught. There were legends about him.

But Senya, from his own experience, knew that these people, able to be everywhere at once and never be caught, simply do not exist. These legends get about concerning individuals whose activity is something out of the ordinary, or not carried on in broad daylight; and those responsible for them are those

other folk, whose lives are what is called very ordinary, and who are bored by their own life and want to believe that some other kind of life, extraordinary life, does exist. Now Martemyanov, when he had got through to Senya, and reported his talk with Sourkov, had, in passing, mentioned that the Skobeyevka Red command had somehow or other come to cross purposes with the bandits. And this little matter, to which then he had paid no attention, troubled him a great deal now.

He made Gladky tell him all he knew about the bandits, but though Gladky had often met them, and once, when he lost his way out hunting, had shared a tiny winter hut with Li-fou himself, he had nothing very definite to say about them. All it amounted to was that one day they would pillage Chinese merchants and landowners, and the next turn round and join hands with the merchants and landowners to rob the natives or Koreans. But he had never bothered his head to think about it; because the life of people like that, who were quite different from Russians in speech and everything else, really seemed to him something unreal.

They talked it over, and decided to bivouac there; if only because it was wiser policy to know exactly where your enemy was. They detached half of their men to spend the night in the woods alongside the clearing, and doubled the guards. The platoon leaders were under orders not to sleep.

The forest grew darker and darker, and the fires in the clearing scattered sparks, brighter and brighter, till they threw hard light on the men's faces and the trunks of the trees around them. There were now two boundary lines of fires—those of the Reds and those of the bandits, and the brightly-lit space in between them was still deserted.

Gladky and Senya lit their fire behind it all, on a knoll. They had only just boiled a mess of *kasha*, and begun to sup, when one of their men, in a shaggy busby, came up to them from the barrack. He shaded his eyes from the fire and delivered his message.

"The head of the bandits wants to come over to see you. Shall I let him?"

Senya and Gladky exchanged glances.

"Well, why not? Ye-e-es, let him come," Senya said, hesitating a little.

But Li-fou's high-cheekboned face, with its trickling tears, was already there, just behind the Red.

"You take a little rest?" he said, and smiled, though only with his mouth; and then he squatted down beside their fire.

He said nothing for a time, merely pretended not to notice any resentment at his unexpected appearance there, and fiddled with dry twigs on the ground with his thin yellow fingers. Then he slowly tossed the twigs, one by one, on to the fire, and looked mournfully at Senya.

"Won't you come over to our building?" he asked, "my commanders have something to say to you. Eh? . . ."

Senya was troubled. He stroked his thin locks and squinted at Gladky.

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't." Gladky said, with rueful eyes on the *kasha*.

They passed down the avenue of fires and followed Li-fou into his hut. It was filled with lines of little tables, jostling one another; on the tables were frail little Chinese cups and the remains of food. The bandits had had their supper, and were squatting in rows down the little tables, puffing at their pipes. The first on the right, inside the door, was corpulent Ka-say. Against the wall on the left two men stood holding pine torches. The air was sooty. Flickering shadows kept stirring over the rough rafters and the faces of the squatting men.

Blocks of wood were brought to the visitors for stools. They sat as near as they could to the door. Gladky already had his usual ironic expression, but Senya still could not decide how to behave, and his glance wandered uneasily to and fro. Li-fou lit a pipe and squatted down beside Ka-say.

"You have marched long way . . . you fatigued," said Li-fou, and puffed at his pipe. "The gnat not give you much pleasure to sleep. We shall put this building at disposal of you and your officers."

He was trying to get them into a disadvantageous position for the night.

"Thanks for your goodwill," Gladky said; "but it really isn't necessary, you know—we're folk used to roughing it."

"Used to roughing it. This is true," said Li-fou. "So are we—we are the same," he added, and his mouth alone smiled.

"All people are same, is this not so? Tell me you teach there are no noble, no humble—all one man. Eh? . . ."

"Yes, well, yes, but not quite," Senya unexpectedly spoke up, with flashing white teeth. "Wherever did you learn to speak Russian so well?"

"O-o-oh, not only Russian," Li-fou cried, trying to be very impressive, "I am acquainted three European and Japanese languages. I was interpreter, staff of Mukden armies. Long ago—1887, if it interesting to you. Then no grey hairs, no scar on chin. Very honourable. But military service did not suit me. If you ever come province Heiludzian, hear a lot about me. . . . Why, of course, merchants, nobles, much nice things say about Li-fou. But every peasant tell you my great justice. Mothers teach little children pray my success. . . ."

And Li-fou reached in his tunic pocket and took out a handkerchief, and wiped away the tears that all this time had been trickling down his cheeks.

He spoke with that expression of something mysterious, of being preoccupied with some different, hidden sense in what he said—an expression that really concealed absolutely nothing—but which he knew was bound to make him so much more important in the eyes of people of quite different circumstances in life. But Senya was all the time conscious of something strained and artificial in both his gestures and his words, and so he did not attach to the latter any other meaning but that the bandit was out to hoodwink them.

"It is foolish for us to be at hostility," said Li-fou, while the tears trickled down his cold cheeks. "We are struggling for one thing. Only it is misfortune that all your people do not know this. There have been some cases of attacking my forces by Soutchan. This is very bad. It is not for your advantages. It is not for my advantages. If you attack us you have no safe rear. You cannot retire in forest swamp. For in forest swamp you will find one of my men behind every tree. Eh? . . ."

"Where exactly were your men attacked?" Gladky asked.

"One attack take place in Khmylovka. Other near Korean village Nikolaievka. . . ."

"Off their own bat, perhaps?" Senya asked.

"No, I have information that these units are sent out against us by your staff ordering."

"We've no information of that sort. . ."

"It is not my fault," said Li-fou, and his mouth alone smiled. "You soon be Soutchan. Say I not hostile with you. We need alliance. We need treaty. See what points I propose for our treaty. . . ."

Out of a side pocket he pulled a sheet of red paper folded lengthwise and handed it to Senya. Gladky smoothed his moustaches and pretended, by bending down over Senya, that he, too, was reading, though he could not read at all. Dozens of pairs of eyes pointed at them from out of the darkness of the barrack.

This is what was carefully written out on the paper in Chinese ink:

To the Officer Commanding the Russian Revolutionary Forces.

In view of misunderstanding which have place at villages Khmylovka and Nikolaievka, Korean village, between troops of Russian Revolutionary Force and Revolutionary Chinese Force, I, Li-fou, officer commanding Revolutionary Force Chinese people, propose the following treaty to accept and sign both by Russian Revolutionary Command and Command Chinese Revolutionary Army:

1. Russian Revolutionary Command and Command of Chinese Revolutionary Army undertake to make no further action regarding conflicts at Khmylovka and Nikolaievka.

2. Russian Revolutionaries and Chinese Revolutionary troops maintain complete neutrality regarding one another and vice versa.

3. Russian Revolutionaries undertake they not interfere by activity with life or interests of Chinese population. Chinese Revolutionary troops undertake they not interfere by activity with life or interests of Russian population.

4. Russian Revolutionaries have no right to help enemies of Chinese Revolutionary troops in any way. Chinese Revolutionary Forces have no right to help enemies of Russian Revolutionaries in any way.

5. The present treaty of Russian Revolutionaries and

Chinese Revolutionary troops make no force on them to help the other.

With sincere respect and sympathy for your work,

(Signed) LI-FOU,
*Commander-in-Chief of the
Revolutionary Armies of the Chinese People.*

"Smart, oh, smart, you old scoundrel," thought Senya, as with difficulty he made out the ill-shaped lines of the letter by the light of the pine flares.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll hand this in," and with his thin fingers he rolled up the slip of paper—then unrolled it again and looked at it.

"Only there are some points not clear to me. . . ."

And, out of desire to fish as much information as possible, he began detailed questions about every point. But Li-fou wriggled so well, and tricked and tied things up, that Senya found he knew less at the end of the conversation than he had done at the beginning.

While this conference was going on in the barrack, the half of the clearing outside, where the Reds were, grew more and more lively: fires crackling merrily, an aroma of soup and stew filled the air, the human din grew steadily greater.

Though each man was thinking of the bandits, hardly anybody spoke about them—it was ordinary camp-fire talk.

At one of the fires the men were smoking out lice, and one of them was telling the tale of how soldiers on the German front got up louse races for money: each man dropped one of his own lice on a large circle of cut-out newspaper, and the man whose louse first got off the board swept the stakes. The teller took great delight in recalling how some big fat lice showed up slow, and, on the contrary, some skinny little hacks showed themselves very lively; and what gambling passion developed in the men, so that some of them lost the whole of their miserable soldier's pittance.

At another fire Mitya Lozhkin, with ears that seemed to un-burgeon and glow from the warmth of the flames, was launched in a series of tall stories of his own exploits. Everybody knew he was lying, and Mitya knew that they all knew, but that was

just what made it all so interesting. Simple folk always enjoy listening to liars and clowns, if only they do the job well. At particularly tall incidents his uncle, Ivan Lozhkin, who was mending his breeches and squatting half-naked on the ground, with his thin hairy limbs stretched out as perches for the mosquitoes, raised his head from his work and called, chiding: "All lies, you fool, Mitya. . . ."

A third group was discussing God. One fellow, with his beard trimmed into a tuft, with a peak cap on, endeavoured to prove the existence of God, while a scraggy-necked rufus, with purple patches under his eyes, held that God did not exist. It was quite clear that the rufus was perfectly convinced of his view, but he had not a single argument, so that all he could reply to the beaver's onslaughts (and the beaver's tongue wagged like a Jesuit's) was to spit contemptuously every time and repeat as poisonously as he could:

"Gawd . . . Gawd . . . my Gawd! what won't he want next!"

". . . Oh yes, but, you know, I don't really miss my family at all," Fyodor Shpak, in the next group was saying, while he sucked one end of his grizzled moustaches—"and I must say I've just forgotten how to work. . . . I suppose there's war enough left to keep us going, anyway. . . ."

"But if there ain't?" someone asked, a little tauntingly.

"Well-l-l-l! Then . . . well, then we'll see," said Shpak, a bit put off.

"But there's no doubt whatever," said a pale young fellow in a padded tunic, "folk do get out of the way of working. And if you think, too," he suddenly went on, "you look at the forest and sky across the fire, and it's pitch black, but look the other way, and how bright t' sky is, and all t' stars in 't."

It was quiet in the bandit part of the clearing. They were all sitting without speaking, hardly stirring even, round their fires. Occasionally one would pull a live coal out of the fire with naked fingers, and get his pipe going again. At times you could see the clear silhouette of one of their sentries, rifle on shoulder, against the background of a fire. And when the flames sprang a little fiercer the shape of the two horses on the knoll stood out more solid.

The barrack wall on the Reds' side was brightly lit by a fire lit quite close to the door. A large group of about twenty Chinese

were sitting round this fire; and corresponding to them opposite was a whole platoon of Reds.

Nikon Kirpichev, a heavy-weight forty-year-old ex-trimmer, with sallow cheeks and split upper lip (cut, and all his front teeth knocked out, by an accident at work) was telling the story of how the bandits attacked the Korean village Korovenka last autumn. Kirpichev was in hiding from Koltchak's militia after the break-up of the Ussuri front, and found himself in the upper parts of Foudzin. He went down into a village to get flour, and what did he find instead of yellow straw huts but still smouldering embers and maimed half-burned bodies. In the ash-foul dust of the road lay the little trunk of a headless sucking babe. There were women in torn white gowns wandering about the smouldering ruins like white shadows; and others rocking from side to side beside their ruined homes, hugging little ones to their bosoms.

"They weren't weeping. . . . If they had only wept or wailed . . ." spluttered Kirpichev; "but they didn't utter a word or a moan, just sat or wandered about . . . such horrible silence, in the evening, a little smoke here or there still—I shall never forget it. And there's this Li-fou can't stop weeping, only they're ice-cold tears. . . ."

"Hallo, boys. Anybody got a bit o' baccy t' spare?" cried Shpak, in his pleasant tenor voice, as he appeared at the fire and stood, his coat flung over his shoulders.

"Oh, it's you, Shpak!"

"Hallo, you bounder."

"Here, squat down at our fire, old man," came the cheerful cries.

"Well, I only came for a bit of baccy. . . ."

"None left, old boy, smoked out. Not got a pinch ourselves. . . ."

"Well, that is a rum show," laughed Shpak, "the whole damned detachment's out of baccy. . . . Look here, I'm going to get some out of the bandit-boys," he suddenly said, and seemed surprised at, pleased with, his own bright thought. "I'm damned if I won't!"

But he hesitated a moment before, waving scruples to the devil, he set off with a decided limp towards the opposite fire; the skirts of his coat flapping about him.

The whole platoon fell silent, and watched him across in anxious silence. Some of them even got up to watch.

"Hallo, lads," they could hear Shpak's sonorous voice, the next minute over at the other fires. "Anyone got a bit o' baccy to spare?"

And they could see him look up and down the men and poke his finger into his mouth a number of times.

An old Chinese, very thin, with ragged nanny beard and so flat a nose you might have thought he had none, silently unrolled his pouch to Shpak. Shpak squatted down beside him.

"Is he smoking," Kirpichev, who could not see because of his neighbour standing in front of him, asked in great curiosity.

"He is," the man answered, delighted.

"Look, look, there he is talking to them, too."

"He is a lad!"

"Well, I'm off, too," said a little mountain type in an army sweater.

He looked round rather guiltily at his comrades, and then he, too, slouched over to the bandits. In a few moments he was waving his hand, calling the others there.

". . . And you just tell me, my friends," said Shpak, plunging into conversation, "how is the land to give crops when we've been ploughing at it ever since we began, the same old land, without any rest, and more or less without any manuring. . . ."

He was squatting there, the tails of his greatcoat on either side of him, and was leaning forward towards a Chinese sitting opposite, a man with a very round, jolly clean-skinned face, and intelligent black eyes—the only one of that lot who knew any Russian.

The Chinese hissed and hahed and nodded his head in complete agreement. He translated Shpak's words to his fellows, who had crowded round and were glancing, first at him, then at Shpak, then at the Reds still coming over and up to the fire.

The old nanny-bearded flat-nosed man said something very quickly.

"He say," said the round-faced intelligent one, "Russian man he no good work land. Chinese man many many million man live, not much land. One man he work little garden, live whole year. Very many man no land at all, very many man die. . . ."

"And what about yourself, did you work the land?" Shpak asked.

"When little boy work. Then no money pay rent, papa, mama die. Me go cook. . . . He, too, go cook . . . (and he pointed at another Chinese). But he (and he pointed to a third) long time bandit. Old man work land (and he pointed at the flat-nosed one). That one tailor. That one work land. That one sea cabbage catch. That one catch crab, lobster. . . . That one work land. . . . That one dive pearls. . . . That one. . . ."

And he pointed them out one by one. Some of them smiled shamefacedly, some hid their faces, some went on calmly smoking.

"Little land, lot of work, little for eat," went on the keen-eyed one. "Big captain, landowners, he get it all for him. . . ."

"Ah, this is what you should do with the big captains," said Kirpichev, who had just sat down beside Shpak, and he clicked his nails together as if he was crushing a flea or a louse. "Our big captains, our landowners, they, too, had the land, but that's what we did with them"—and he repeated his little dumb show.

The Chinese laughed and gesticulated and then turned round, gesticulating all the time, and translated to his comrades.

"Ho! Ho!" came cries from the bandits.

The flat-nosed old man said something very quickly, and looked towards Kirpichev.

"Him say, this what we do with landowner and merchant," and the keen-eyed one threw back his head and drew the edge of his hand sharply over his throat. "Tchi-i-ik!" he said.

"And put the money in your pocket, eh? Put the money in your pocket?" asked Kirpichev, with a meaning smirk.

"What?" the Chinese asked back.

"Put it in your pocket, I said; the posh, you know," Kirpichev laughed. "Cut the b——'s throat and pocket the proceeds. That's right, isn't it?"

The Chinese laughed loudly.

"You've got him one there," cried the little fellow in the sweater.

"And them's your bandits," cried the Reds to each other.

By now the fire was absolutely surrounded by men. Bandits from other fires joined this group by the barrack; and when

they heard that some of our folk were talking to the bandits, and that you could cadge a little tobacco off the bandits, more and more Reds, in whole bands, began to come over. Soon, too, bandits began to go over on to the Reds' side. There was a general mix-up. The bandits treated the Reds to tobacco, and the Reds returned with fat and biscuits. Somebody swapped his water-bottle for a kettle. At one fire a Chinese with a broad, smiling face, gleaming with sweat, spread out a handkerchief covered with dragons on the grass and began to do conjuring tricks.

"Now, how does it come to that," said Kirpichev, as he cast a displeased glance at Ivan Lozhkin's bare legs; for at the very beginning of the fraternizing Lozhkin had joined the original group just as he was, rifle slung over shoulder and breeches in one hand. "How does it come about that though you've all been brought up to work, you turn to highway robbery like this . . . because that's all it is, you know—highway robbery . . . my lads. . . ."

"Oh, ah, eh," cried the keen-eyed Chinese, and he frowned. "Not bandit. Why bandit? Vo-myn-she gown-gak-dan," he cried, and in his excitement involuntarily passed to his own tongue. Then he explained. "We Bolshevik."

"Fine Bolsheviks, I don't think," sneered the little fellow in the sweater.

"And why do you attack the Koreans, then," asked Kirpichev, with the wings of his split lip fluttering. "A fine, quiet people like that, and you attack them. . . ."

"That's their commander to blame, that's Li-fou," said one of the peasant platoon, confidently and calmly. "You see, that's what he lives by; and they've no choice, because, you see, they're in his service. . . ."

"That is no excuse," said Kirpichev angrily.

"Of course it isn't," said another Red, "you want to get together, all of you; get together, and then, then, my boys, you could do as you damned well please!"

"Ha!" cried a pock-marked bandit with a disfigured nose, "ha, very fine. 'Then soldier come. Ping! Ping! He shoot."

He showed it in dumb show, too.

"Peh!" said Kirpichev, with contempt, "they're afraid of soldiers. And what are soldiers? Aren't they men, too?"

Shpak, who had begun the whole thing, did not notice himself how or when he left the group; but he was now sitting, with his head fallen forward, merely listening to the others. And while he thought, he stared into the darkness of the forest, where, in the glow of the bandits' fires, loomed the two horses.

As it was dark, and as it was difficult to believe that the horse he took home last autumn from the Oussouri front should be here among the bandits, Shpak did not recognize his own horse. But, for reasons he could not understand, something drew his eyes that way, and the more he looked the more restless and sad he felt. In spite of what he had said about not missing his family, he was restless and sad now, because there he was sitting in that jungle and his old folk were doing all the heavy work at home, and his little ones were growing up with no father to pet or correct them, and his wife was in the family way, and due to come to her bed, and he wouldn't even know for long enough whether it was a boy or a girl.

From *The Last of the Udegs*, 1928-33.

VALENTIN KATAEV

(*For Biographical Note, see p. 98*)

SPEED UP, TIME !

THE tortoise crawled, wriggling its paws. It had a supernatural coat of armour, steep and high as an overturned basin, and a sorrowful, bewhiskered, camel-like face.

The hack, with its drooping neck and trailing piebald tail, plodded through the mire. It had projecting bones, its lower jaw hung loose, and a tear the size of a wooden spoon fell from its blinking eyes.

The bicycle stood on a pair of uneven wheels which had an incredible number of spokes.

The brigades worked in three shifts. Each shift had its brigade-leader. And was called after him: Hanumov's shift. Yermakov's shift. Istchenko's shift.

The tortoise, the hack, and the bicycle were surrounded by an identical landscape of fantastically bright ferns, gigantic grass, gnome-like bamboo shoots and a red Utopian sun.

Hanumov sat astride the tortoise; Yermakov, back to front on the hack; Istchenko was pedalling the bicycle.

The brigade-leaders were as unlike themselves as any portrait could be unlike an original. Hanumov, however, wore his many-coloured skull-cap, Yermakov his flashy necktie, while Istchenko was obviously bare-footed. And this made the resemblance as indisputable as a good epithet.

In the midst of this antediluvian landscape the tortoise and the hack looked very like metaphors that had inopportunately transplanted themselves from Æsop or Krylov into the latest painting of the French school of Henri Rousseau.

The bicycle, on the contrary, looked antediluvian like a literary detail that had been transplanted as carboniferous flora from a novel of Paul Morand into a lithograph of an ancient encyclopædic dictionary.

These three pictures, painted crudely and naïvely in thick colours upon cardboard, were fastened with disproportionately large nails over the entrance to Korneyev's office.

The office-shed, hastily constructed from fresh, unplanned boards, stood nearby at the back of the warming-house. It bore the same relation to the warming-house as a lifeboat to an ocean steamer.

From the office came the clicking of abacuses.

The first shift had ended. The second had not yet begun. It was held up by the pavlovs. The lads of the first and second shifts sat about on the logs, disputing about the pictures.

Shura possessed a rich enough store of household metaphors to characterize the most varied shades of speed.

Shura made use of them with the unaffected precision of a chemist measuring out a drug. She might have chosen a snail, she might have chosen a locomotive, a cart, a car, an aeroplane, or anything else. She might, finally, have chosen the negative majesty of a backing crayfish, an act real crayfish are never known to perform.

Shura, however, had conscientiously weighed all the factors of the last "decade,"¹ and, on comparing them with those of the preceding, had chosen the tortoise, the hack, and the bicycle.

That was an entirely just estimate. But the pictures had been as a thorn in the eyes of the shifts for the eighth day now. They were changed too seldom, only once in a "decade." But within the last eight days the factors had abruptly changed. Hanumov had jumped some hundred and twenty per cent. Istchenko lagged behind. Yermakov had forged past Istchenko and was catching up with Hanumov. Hanumov had visions already of a locomotive. Yermakov of a car at least.

But the old pictures hung on, as if in spite, punishing old sins, and they were to hang there for another two days.

A lanky, long-haired lad from Hanumov's shift looked hate at the tortoise.

"And why a tortoise? What's a tortoise to do with it?" he muttered, taking a deep breath. "What's a tortoise to do with it?"

He had already thrown off his canvas overall and had taken a shower, but had not yet recovered from the strain of the work. He sat there with his pointed chin propped on his angular,

¹ *Decade*: period of ten days.

high-raised knees, wearing a pink cotton shirt with loose collar and sleeves, a wet tuft of hair drooping over his eyes. He spat out every other minute and licked his thin, pink lips.

"They would think of a tortoise!"

Another lad from Yermakov's shift, a boisterous fellow in bast shoes and dust-goggles, was taunting:

"The Hanumov gang must find it hard riding a tortoise. They're used to gallowing in cars."

Then the Hanumov lads chipped in:

"Your hack's fine riding, my word!"

"They've never been used to anything else."

"Liar! they used to scorch in a cart last year."

"And you lads rode a snail for two 'decades,'" the boisterous fellow cut in. "And on the top of that you drag a red banner with you wherever you go. Giving the flag a ride on a tortoise. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

A fresh band came up. Crowded round. In bast shoes; bare-footed; in overalls; without overalls; in shoes; fair-headed; freshly-washed; dirty, covered in greenish cement-flour like millers; rowdy; quiet; in sweaters; in football jerseys; in shirts; from Hanumov's gang; from Yermakov's; all sorts; but, without exception, all young, all with eager, sparkling eyes. . . .

"Joking apart. How can you talk of a tortoise when we mixed ninety cubes in seven hours to-day."

"But we did a hundred and twenty, and ninety-six the day before yesterday."

"Ninety-five."

"More, ninety-six. We mixed a cube in the office."

"But splashed it all out on the road. You made a devil of a mess of all the boards. Cement costs money."

"You don't pay for it."

"Who pays, then?"

"The office pays."

"There's a good 'un. Did you hear it? Clever, isn't it? With ideas like that you'll go on riding a hack back to front all your life."

"Haven't you done stuffing our ears with the hack? Take it away, to the devil, wherever you like."

And suddenly:

"We won't do another stroke of work till it's taken away."

Just think of it, a hack! And when we worked on the dam with our bare hands and fifty degrees below. . . .”

And they took it up:

“No work till it’s taken away!”

“We can’t look others straight in the eyes!”

“Enough!”

“No work! . . .”

“If only the rain were to wash off those beastly animals!”

“But it rains only twice a year here. . . .”

Scowling, Hanumov emerged from the office. And he really did wear a skull-cap.

He was a pug-nosed, strongly pock-pitted, squat, red-haired Arsamacian Tartar. His narrow eyes were blue. He might easily have been mistaken for a Russian. His cheek-bones slanted, however, and his legs were a trifle shorter.

He emerged from the office wearing a pair of new, red prize shoes and dragging an ample red banner.

Two months back the Hanumov gang had fought for and won this banner. Ever since they had held on to it like grim death. They wouldn’t do anything without their banner. They went to work and returned from work singing, with unfurled banner. While working they would stick it in the ground somewhere at hand where it could be seen. Even for their pay they marched, the whole band of them, with their banner. And once they went to a perambulating theatre to see *Violent Love*, and took the banner with them; they had to leave it for safe-keeping with the barman. It stood there right through the performance behind a barrel of moor-berry kvas.

“Are you ready?” Hanumov said, in a faintly perceptible Tartar accent, unfurling the banner.

He squinted at the tortoise and tapped the black, quartz earth with the flagstaff.

“Two bad shifts, and this is the eighth day we’re riding it. And we’ll have to sit a couple more, to be jeered at. Very nice, I’m sure.”

He threw the banner angrily and heavily over his raised shoulder.

“Shift, form!”

The shift formed up under the banner.

A mechanic came running up, wiping his hands on a bit of

tow. He had been handing over his job to the Yermakov shift. He threw down the tow and took his place under the shadow of the banner, and his face at once flamed bright red like a glowing lampshade.

"All here?"

"All."

"March!"

The relief gang moved off in a variegated crowd after Hanumov.

"Say, Hanumov, what about Harkoff?" the lanky youth asked, wiping his forehead with an arm that stuck out from a pink loosely-dangling sleeve.

"Don't you worry about Harkoff," Hanumov ground out without turning his head. "We'll give Harkoff hell."

Here the driver, Lusha, a short-legged girl in a pleated skirt, struck up a song in a ringing, high-pitched village voice:

"It's g-goood to su-uff-fer in the Sprrr-ing
Uuunder the grreen grreen pine-tree. . . ."

And the lads took up in chorus, quickening the tempo:

"And you'll never, never see,
What's my lot to ever see,
And you'll never suffer—no,
What's my lot to suffer—yes. . . ."

They returned from their work to the barracks like soldiers from the front. They were swallowed up in a chaos of black dust, excavated earth, lumbered materials. They suddenly reappeared, in their full stature, singing and with banner aloft, on the fresh crest of a new mound.

The time was eleven forty-five.

Margouliess was counting the mixers to himself:

"Three hundred and eighty-eight, three hundred and eighty-nine, three hundred and ninety. . . ."

The crowd thronged to the terrace. A noisy crowd. It kept loud count of the mixers:

"Three hundred and ninety, three hundred and ninety-one, three hundred and ninety-two. . . ."

"Three. . . ."

"... Four. . . ."

"... Five. . . ."

The beams of projectors beat down from the roof of the warming-house. The projectors were disposed in groups. Six to each group. Six blinding glass buttons sewn in a double row to each shield.

On the brightly-lit terrace figures dashed to and fro with wheelbarrows. Each figure cast a multitude of short, radial shadows.

The variedly shaped stars of shadows traverse, cross, meet and diverge in a precise, boisterous and youthful rhythm.

The rhythm is calculated to the fraction of a minute, and the men work like a clock.

A barrow of rubble.

A barrow of cement.

A barrow of sand.

"The scoop and water!"

A turn of the lever, and the scoop and water swing forward in a single movement of the arm.

"They won't do it!"

"They'll do it!"

The crash of unloading concrete.

"Three hundred and ninety-six. . . ."

"Three hundred and ninety-seven. . . ."

"... Eight . . ."

"... Nine. . . ."

"The time?"

Korneyev held his eyes fixed on his watch. The projectors hurt his eyes. Korneyev shielded himself from the light with the palm of his hand. He sniffed nervously, coughed. Sharp tears rose to his eyes.

"Two to zero."

"They'll do it!"

"They won't do it!"

Nolbandov strode through the dark towards the work-front. On every side flashed low dazzling stars of fire. They impeded the sight. He tripped over some logs, over wire. He groped his way back and fumbled with his stick held out in front of him.

Ahead loomed a blaze of light and the dense mass of the crowd.

Fame!

That's what they call fame?

Yes, that's fame.

Nolbandov made his way through the crowd with his stick. He pushed through with a swing of his broad shoulders.

The drum was rattling away.

"Four hundred."

A dead silence fell on the crowd. The barrows rolled along with a slithering screech. The motor droned. Blue sparks flew out of it. The scoop swung forward grinding and scraping.

The drum rattled away.

"Four hundred and one. . . ."

"Zero hour," Korneyev said, in a hushed voice.

But everybody heard his voice.

"They haven't done it."

"Missed it by one."

Silence and the soft drone of the smoothly easing drum.

But this silence is suddenly shattered by a distant, clear blare of a trumpet.

Valtorna impetuously pronounced the opening phrase of a march, a phrase as shiny and involved as a snail. A happy phrase in the brazen language of youth and fame. An entire band took up the phrase.

The band thundered in showy breathless bass notes, in blunt, round taps of the drum, in a buzz of tympani and in cries of bassoons.

That was Hanumov leading his brigade.

It drew near.

It passed lamp after lamp, projector after projector. It appeared for a moment in a flood of light, then disappeared into the dark.

It was swallowed up in the black chaos of excavated earth and lumbered materials. It passed from plane to plane. It appeared suddenly, in full stature, on the fresh crest of a new mound, shot through and through, from below, in beams of invisible projectors set in the hollows.

The trumpets of the band glitter, and so does Hanumov's gilt skull-cap, as he carries the banner on his shoulder.

He was leading his brigade to the front.

"They didn't do it!"

Istchenko slowly shoulders his spade. Projectors riddled his eyes on all sides. He raised a shielding palm. He turned this way and that. And everywhere loomed faces, faces. . . .

He shielded himself from faces, from eyes.

He crossed the terrace slowly, with drooping head, hunching his stout shoulders and pattering along on small, bare and tenacious feet.

The lads followed him slowly across the terrace.

The motor stopped.

Mossia sat in the middle of the terrace, his legs gathered under him in Turkish fashion and his head propped on his knees. His arms hung loosely at his sides.

In the warming-house the last trial cube of concrete was being poured into a wooden form to test its quality.

Here had gathered the representatives of the laboratories, of the management, of the newspapers, also engineers and technicians.

They signed the official deed with an indelible pencil by the light of projectors that lay strewn about the floor like helmets.

Ten samples of concrete in carefully numbered and sealed wooden boxes will be sent to the central laboratory for expert testing.

Exactly seven days later the hardened cubes of concrete will be put to the test. Only then will their quality be determined. And not before.

Concrete must stand a pressure of 100 kilos per square centimetre. If it fails to do this and crack, it would mean that all the work had been as good as wasted. And would necessitate the breaking up of the slab and beginning all over again.

Margouliess' fate depended on the quality of the concrete. Margouliess himself was convinced. The facts were in his pocket.

Yet he could not help feeling anxious and worked up. Tables and formulæ flashed mechanically through his head. He might have been feverishly revising all his knowledge, all his experience. Pages and pages flashed by.

Everything seemed in order.

Yet. . . . Who knows? . . . It might be bad quality concrete or the mixing might have been badly done,

Margouliess picked up the gnawed end of an indelible pencil and signed the deed with a flourish.

Nolbandov was supervising the despatch of the cubes. Unceremoniously he counted the boxes over with his stick and gave his orders.

The sound of the band reached his ears. He blinked, laughed ironically, and shrugged his shoulders.

The band was now thundering in the vicinity.

"Yes, I've been noticing our lads think work's a carnival. It might be Nice! Very interesting."

Margouliess glanced attentively at his face, which was yellow, lit up in sculptural relief, black-bearded, full of abrupt lights and shadows. Margouliess was about to speak, when he suddenly became aware of a strange silence.

The motor had stopped throbbing.

"What has happened? Excuse me. . . ."

He ran to the motor.

Korneyev was standing there, looking up, talking to the mechanic. The mechanic was wiping his hands on a bit of tow. The timekeeper was sorting out and counting over some papers.

"What's the matter? Why aren't you working?"

"The shift's done. They've finished. Missed by one mixer. Four hundred and one."

Margouliess took off his spectacles and wiped his forehead with the palm of his hand. He smeared spots of concrete all over his face.

"Wait. . . . I don't understand. . . . What time is it?"

"One minute past twelve."

Margouliess quickly put on his glasses.

"And when did we begin?"

"Sixteen-eight."

"What are you doing, then? Stop there! What are you doing?"

Margouliess ran at break-neck speed across the terrace. "Stop! Who ordered you to finish? To your places!"

The brigade stopped.

"Motor!" Margouliess cried beside himself. "Motor! You began at sixteen-eight. The halt because of the cement stores makes ten minutes, because of Semietchik—eight,

Smetana's accident—seven. That makes thirty-three minutes. We have still thirty-three minutes."

Istchenko stood rooted to the ground.

Mossia leapt to his feet.

"Stop, stop! Motor! Back to your places."

"Back you go," Istchenko shouted. "Hey now, lads, back to your places. Do you hear me? To the barrows! Spades! Levers!"

His voice rose, rose, rose, and reached the vibrant pitch of a cavalry command:

"To your—pla-a-ces!"

"Ready? Go!" Mossia shouted, forcing his voice. "Go-o!"

Everything started, sped, mixed, hummed, banged, flashed.

A barrow of rubble.

A barrow of cement.

A barrow of sand.

"The scoop and water!"

The drum revolved and unloaded itself.

"Four hundred and two. Four hundred and three. Four hundred and four."

Mossia threw down his barrow half-way. He made a dash for the motor. He clambered up the parapet of the terrace like an unclean spirit.

He tore down the poster. He tore it to pieces and threw the pieces in the air. Lit up by the projectors, they careered and span in the air.

He rushed back to the barrow.

"Hur-r-r-ah!"

"Go it, lads. Go it!"

The crowd kept count in chorus:

"Four hundred and five, four hundred and six . . ."

Magnesium flared. Cameras clicked.

" . . . Seven . . ."

" . . . Eight . . ."

" . . . Nine . . ."

Margouliess looked himself over in the light of the projectors. He examined his knees and elbows. He dusted himself. He twisted himself round in an attempt to see if his back were soiled or not. He moistened his handkerchief and stealthily wiped his face, then polished his spectacles.

He wiped his shoes by rubbing his feet together, and set his cap straight.

His lips twitched in a scarce-perceptible smile, and, without another glance at the brigade, he made his way unhurryingly to the office.

Nolbandov was there.

He sat, sprawling on a low plank bench with the back of his head propped against a wall. The skirts of his black overcoat trailed on the floor. He was playing indifferently with a cane.

The office was stuffy, full of smoke and noise. . . .

The tables were covered over with yellow, faded newspapers. The newspapers, stained with red-lilac ink-blots, were dirty and scribbled over in pencil.

The tables were piled with accountancy books, reports, deeds, petitions, orders, graphs.

Shura Soldatova squatted on the floor as she pasted together the poster-paper *tempos*. Her hair tumbled over her eyes. She brushed it back. Modestly she pulled her flimsy black skirt over her soiled, glossy, and rosy knees.

The clerks were clicking on their abacuses, smoking and drinking cold tea that tasted strongly of chloride.

Kutaisov was rowing with somebody over the telephone.

Georgyi Vasilievitch sat, with his elbows wide apart, on a stool that was too low and shaky for him. He was scribbling an article in pencil on the edge of the table.

Vinkitch stood over him, peering at the paper, ruffling his hair and encouraging him:

"More, more, Georgyi Vasilievitch. Excellent. That's what it means to be a real writer. And you pretended you could not write articles and that you were technically unprepared. And you're figuring it out no worse than any professional worker."

Vinkitch was flattering mercilessly. But he had to get Georgyi Vasilievitch's signature at all costs; he must at all costs have a name with some weight to it.

A battle was imminent. He would fight to the death. He was picking his weapons beforehand.

"Write, Georgyi Vasilievitch, write."

Georgyi Vasilievitch knew that Vinkitch was exaggerating, but it gave him pleasure nevertheless.

"Well, we'll remember old times, when we used to write for

papers," he muttered groaning. "Ah, well, well, an old mare won't make a crooked furrow."

His eyes were open, kindly, and shiny. He wrote as if inspired. His pencil raced over the sheet. Vinkitch read out in an undertone:

"Two opposing currents have lately become perceptible in the sphere of *tempos* directing concrete construction . . . Very good, very true . . . and that of the employment of concrete mixers. On one hand, we have an uninterrupted increase in the number of mixers (full stop). On the other hand, the responsible engineers of several of the largest plants have categorically protested against any increase in the number of mixers (comma), since they hold that an increase in the number of mixers may have a negative effect upon the setting of this expensive imported material.' Very good."

Vinkitch cast a hurried glance at Nolbandov and said, deliberately raising his voice:

"Georgyi Vasilievitch, will you insert 'seemingly' in front of 'negative.'"

He emphasized the "seemingly."

"Seemingly negative.' Write 'seemingly negative.' It's more forcible."

"Seemingly,' all right. We can put down 'seemingly.' 'Seemingly negative' . . . Very well. . . ."

Nolbandov was deaf. He was not listening.

"Setting and quality," he was thinking.

He let his glance stray carelessly round the room.

Newspapers, newspapers, newspapers lay everywhere. . . .

The newspapers were full of heroes' portraits. Reels of heads. Columns of heads. Rungs of heads.

Heads, heads, heads.

Navvies, concrete-layers, electricians, paviors, carpenters, mechanics, chemists, draughtsmen. . . .

Old, young, and middle-aged.

Kepis, caps, hats, skull-caps. . . .

Names, names, names.

Fame.

That's what they call fame?

Yes, that is fame.

That is the most genuine kind of fame. That is how fame is

really come by. Fame is come by "here." "There," it can only be imagined.

He looked sideways at Shura Soldatova.

She was down on all fours, sticking out her tongue like a child, while pasting Margouliess' photograph on a sheet of poster-paper.

"Yes, this is fame," he thought. "And I am foolishly letting it slip by."

One had to make a name for oneself—a name, a name.

The name must be reprinted in newspapers, recalled in reports, remembered in debates, repeated at meetings and discussions.

It was so simple.

One had only to keep level with the technical achievements of the epoch. That level might be low, elementary. Let it be a thousand times lower than the level of Europe or America, though, in fact, probably higher.

The epoch demands enterprise and one must be adventurous.

The epoch spares neither laggards nor dissidents.

Yes, this is fame.

And that day he had let slip a lucky chance.

What could be simpler?

One had only to keep up with the times. Take this record business into one's own hands, organize, set in motion, trumpet, be the first. . . .

He had committed a tactical error. But it was not too late. A thousand such chances still lay ahead of him.

" . . . Four hundred and twenty-nine . . . "

Korneyev had his eyes glued on his watch.

" . . . Zero, thirty-three minutes. Enough! Stop."

Istchenko carefully set down his barrow and wiped his face with the skirt of his shirt.

"Stop work! Stop the motor!"

He gave a lazy wave of his tired arm at the mechanic.

The drum came to a smooth stop.

The crowd roared "Hurrah."

Looking straight in front of him, Istchenko descended without haste from the terrace. The crowd made way.

Hanumov stood before him.

He stood there, wearing his brightly glittering, gilt skull-cap, his red prize shoes, red-headed, pug-nosed, pock-pitted, his legs planted firmly in the ground, and negligently leaning with his arm upon the staff of his unfurled banner.

Istchenko dropped his eyes and smiled.

Hanumov smiled back. But frowned almost immediately.

"Well, Kostia? . . ."

His voice sounded friendly, solemn, but at the same time menacing.

He stopped. He searched for, but could not find, appropriate words. He stood for a while in silence and then held out his hand.

They embraced and awkwardly kissed each other thrice under the folds of the banner.

Thrice Istchenko's lips felt the harshness of Hanumov's cheek, which was as rough as a board.

"Well, Kostia. . . . Fame has come your way to-day, a great victory. A world record, and that doesn't come one's way every day. In a word, I wish you well, accept my congratulations. You're champion of the 'construction.' Champion for to-day. Four hundred and twenty-nine mixers, all as like as a rouble. Fine fellow. A good brigade-leader. You gave Harkoff hell. Kuznetsk hell. In one shift you gave hell to the lot of them. All the facts speak in your favour. An ideal brigade-leader, judging by the given set of results."

Hanumov swallowed hard.

"You did four hundred and twenty-nine mixers," he shouted suddenly. "But we're aiming at five hundred. Five hundred, and not one less. Five hundred. We won't quit at less. We'd rather drop."

Dawn.

The train was traversing the Urals.

Through the windows the "Europe-Asia" obelisk can be seen, flying past in a whirl from left to right.

A meaningless post. . . .

I demand its removal.

We shall never again be Asia.

Never, never, never!

In the puddles among the hills blow yellow flowers, downy as ducklings.

A tiny moon fades like a compact bud of lily of the valley in a green sky.

Klava hides her wet face in a moist bunch of lily of the valley.

She peers out of the window through the bunch of lily of the valley.

Branches of lily of the valley, out of all proportion, flash by like telegraph poles.

Children are selling lily of the valley at the stations. There is the fragrance of lilac everywhere.

Dawn is brimmed with an icy dew.

A harsh, glassy gurgle ripples in the clay throat of night.

Nightingales purl and purl through the night till dawn.

They are not afraid of the train.

A highway of lilies of the valley and nightingales.

Ufa, Saratov.

Clouds, elevators, fences, Mordavian sarafans, water-pumps, caterpillars, echelons, churches, minarets, collective farms, village soviets.

And on all sides, from right to left and from left to right, from West to East and from East to West, stride poles in diagonal, unfolding array, poles bearing high-tension currents.

Six-armed, six-legged, they stride like monsters, like Martians, casting barred shadows over forests and hills, over thickets and rivers, over the thatched roofs of villages. . . .

We shall never again be Asia.

Never, never never!

POETRY

SOVIET POETRY

THERE prevails an opinion that poetry in Russia to-day is in a depressed condition. Depression is certainly the keynote of the post-War European scene, but is least of all true of Russian poetry, which, if anything, has been characterized by exuberance. Poetry has still a wide appeal; "obscure" poets like Pasternak can sell out frequent and large editions of their works; and, according to a Soviet writer, long poems are second in demand in public libraries. A poetic revival (Symbolism) had come about in Russia at the beginning of the century, and, by 1912, this had been made more militant by the advent of Futurism, which, more than elsewhere, answered fundamental needs and became identified with the Revolutionary movement. And, after all, practically all the principal Soviet poets, with the exception of Essenin, have come out of Futurism.

Nowhere indeed have the critical problems facing humanity at large, man in particular, and poetry as the barometer of human fears and aspirations, been so intensely and feverishly fought out to the cost often of the poet's life. (The Surréaliste movement in France—the only group-attempt at a similar intensive thrashing out of "fundamentals"—is, by comparison, sectarian and eccentric.) This is why the Soviet poetic scene, though having many features in common with that of Europe, is yet its most dramatic epitome.

The Ideal State, always a preoccupation with poetry, become again a principle of political action justifying the condemnation of a whole world of emotive complexes and values, makes this poetry one of fierce conflict, and, essentially, of action. It is a poetry of transition, a manifestation of movements and of individuals attempting to orientate themselves to the past (complexes of feelings), the present (necessity for action), and the future (the Ideal State).

Soviet poetry ought to be Futurist in every way. The Future State towards which the poetry of to-day is striving becomes the criterion of the present. Culturally, a proletarian epic could only be written by a poet whose vision embraced the architecture of the Proletarian World State, as Dante's vision

embraced the architecture of Christendom. But present-day poetry is transitional. Hence the "laboratory" view of this poetry as an experimental means to the attainment of such a state. Hence, too, pending the conditions permitting of the achievement of this final Symbolism, the denial of the validity of individual experience outside of a compact, collective will. This might be called "intermediary technique," *i.e.* the poet's experiment (of style and attitude) and governmental tactics (for controlling that self-styled ruler and prophet—the poet).

In practice, Soviet poetry has had to fight against reaction in the shape of a deal of current proletarian poetry which is a throw-back to most elementary and realist types of literature. This fact raises the great problem of style, on which the future of Soviet poetry depends. The issue between Futurist poetry (widely interpreted) and proletarian poetry (narrowly interpreted) is one between *medium* and *statement*. The Futurist destroyed the direct narrative and its traditional complex of statements. For this, stress had to be laid on pure word associations. Proletarian poetry is more concerned with *statement* (of faith or action). This latter, unsupported by real poetic conviction or consciousness of change in language as well as in outward forms of life, lends itself to the reiteration of banalities and *naïvetés* no less oppressive than those of the automatic bourgeois refrains predestined to destruction. Statement of a definite and noble attitude to life is the necessary ingredient of a new and lasting work. Mayakovsky, while free with Futurist dynamite, already felt the overwhelming necessity for statement, evolved his rhetorical mass style, and, finally, in 1917-18, placed himself entirely at the service of the Revolution, with the result that his poetry becomes more and more formal. In his 1905 Pasternak also attempts to adapt his thematic lyrical style to narrative. The ballad, too, which became popular during the civil wars and which was used by Demian Biedny and Tikhonov, is still widely current. The problem, then, is how to make positive statements in a new way. The following are some of the elements determining the development of the new style: (a) an enriched and complicated vernacular; (b) a simplified technical language; (c) experiments in poetic diction and neologism; (d) dogma and myth (narrative).

The antagonism of Rationalism and Emotionalism is another

of the aspects of the internal conflict in Soviet poetry. The Soviet State is frequently identified with rational planning, whereas emotion tends to be identified with bourgeois complexes. This is over-simplification, but necessary, perhaps, to justify a radical attitude to the past. The antagonism, in any case, has given rise to two startling dramas: to Essenin's individualist revolt and suicide—the strongest protest made by any Soviet citizen against the "Future"—and to Mayakovsky's acceptance of the "rational" Revolution, which, by gradually making him eliminate old "emotive" strains and arrive at formally perfect and ingenious poster-poetry, seems to have increased the influence of emotion in his private life, and to have driven him to commit suicide for the derided passion of unrequited love. The *formalism* of Mayakovsky's later poetry also applies to the rational Bezimensky, who reproaches Mayakovsky for his suicide, and forms a genre characteristic of a part of Soviet poetry. Younger poets, like Bagritzky and Antokolsky, would seem to be steering clear of this and are arriving at what has been termed "concrete realism."

In the section that follows, Blok, Biely, and Voloshin, the Visionaries, are poets of an older Symbolist generation who bridge the gap of 1917 and greet the Revolution in Messianic terms. Chlebnikov, Tsvetaeva, Achmatova, Gumilev, and Essenin are intellectuals preoccupied with poetry, experiment, and experience, and who try to come to grips with the Revolution. Chlebnikov, the most revolutionary of poets, died in 1922, while Tsvetaeva emigrated after writing *The Separation*. Gumilev and Achmatova, Acmeists both, part ways, for Gumilev was shot in 1922 and Achmatova has stopped writing. Essenin champions old "wooden" Russia and plays havoc with rational plans. Revolutionary poets, like Mayakovsky, Tikhonov, Selvinsky, are intellectuals who have identified themselves with the Revolution. Bezimensky and Ushakov are poets of proletarian origin and conviction. Pasternak, the most considerable living Soviet poet, remains influential but isolated because of his peculiarly independent attitude.

G. R.

SECTION A

THE VISIONARIES AND THE POETS
OF THE SCHISM

ALEXANDER BLOK

Alexander Blok (1880-1921) was brought up in an atmosphere of high culture, and graduated at the University. He began writing very early, but appeared in print only in 1902. His early books, Ante Lucem and Verses about the Beautiful Lady (1904), moved him into the forefront of Russian Symbolism. Then followed a series of poetical works reflecting the poet's spiritual researches: The Earth's Bubbles, Balaganchik (1907), The Mask of Snow (1907), The Terrible World, Harps and Fiddles, Constellation, Verses about Russia, The Stranger, and The Rose and the Cross. In a series of articles and public addresses, The People and the Intelligentsia, Nature and Culture, and The End of Humanism, Blok expressed his alarm as to the fate of Russian culture. Already before the War, Blok was recognized as the outstanding Russian poet, and his popularity was rapidly increasing. After the Revolution Blok welcomed Bolshevism as a manifestation of a national impulse towards social and religious truth. His poems, The Scythians and The Twelve (1918), roused a storm of enthusiasm and indignation. The poet's last years were marked by disenchantment and spiritual conflict. He died in 1921. Blok's poetry, as his poem, New America (1913), shows, had often a prophetic character.

NEW AMERICA

DAY of joy and merry rejoicing,
Though no star breaks the barrier of clouds.
And you stand thrashed in merciless storms,
O my country, fateful and precious.

And the snows, vast forests and steppes
Fall between us, concealing your face.
Eyes see only the terrible sweep
And the fabulous endless expanse.

And dragging my feet through the snowdrifts,
I enter your swift, fragile sledges.
No opulent coffin preserves you,
O my Finnish and beggarly Rus!

And now, you are worshipping humbly,
Or, an old woman, piously pray,
Call of prayer and the ringing of bells,
And then crosses, and cross after cross. . . .

But at times, your incense so fragrant
And blue seems other and strange.
No! No familiar, no Lenten look
Peeps from under that bright Moscow scarf!

Through all these prostrations and candles,
Liturgies, liturgies, liturgies,
Steal the quiet and whispering words
That will kindle a flame on your cheeks. . . .

Farther and farther. . . . And the wind streams,
Devastating black deserts of earth. . . .
And the wind swings a shrub by the road
As a deacon might shake out his stole. . . .

And beyond the turbulent river,
Where the feather-grass kisses the earth,
Blows the odour of free, acrid smoke,
And whistles resound in the distance.

What, again new hordes of Polovtzi?
Or the 'Tartars' uproarious might?
Is the savage steppe raging again
With the fire of the Turkish fezes?

No! There waves no banner of Prince,
And no helmets are draining the Don,
And no Viking's beautiful niece
Weeps, cursing her fate and the clans.

No! No Cossack tufts toss in the wind,
And no standards of Turk scorch the steppe.
Only factory chimneys rise black,
Only factory chimneys sing out.

O steppe, your way's endless and bleak.
Only steppe, and the wind, and the wind,
Then a factory, storey on storey,
And a workers' dense city of shacks.

In this wilderness, desert expanse,
You're still what you were, yet another.
You face me with eyes like a stranger's,
And another thought overwhelms me.

Black coal—subterranean Messiah!
Black coal—here is bridegroom and Tsar!
But I fear not, my bride, O my Russia,
The voice of these stone songs of yours.

The coal groans, and the salt flashes white,
And the iron ore howls in the deeps . . .
And climbs over deserts of steppe
New America's star on my sight.

1913.

FROM THE TWELVE

. . . On they march with measured tread. . . .
"Hey, who's skulking there? Come out!"
That's the wind with banner red
Tossing in the stormy rout. . . .

Freezing snowdrifts lie ahead.
"Hey, who's skulking there? Come near!"
A poor, mangy cur unfed
Slinks and shambles in the rear. . . .

"Scuttle fast, you mangy cur.
Bayonets shall make you skip!
Ancient world and mangy cur,
Hustle, or you'll feel the whip."

Like a famished wolf it scowls,
Slinks behind with gaping jaws,
Famished vagrant cur, it howls . . .
"Hey, who's there? Reply, who goes?"

"Who advances, flaunting red?
Look, what darkness black ahead!
Who runs skulking and is fled,
Leaving houses for the dead?"

"We shall get you, no mistake,
Better come, or curse your lot!
Comrade, out, or never wake,
We shall rake you with our shot!"

Crrack-crack-crack! The echoes peal,
Rousing houses in their rows. . . .
Storms, carousing, laugh and reel,
Through the vastness of the snows.

Crrack-crack-crack!
Crrack-crack-crack!

. . . On they march with measured tread:
And behind, the mongrel lean;
In advance, with banner red,
Through the whirling storm unseen,
Charmed, unharmed by hail of lead,
With a soft snow step and light,
Showered in myriad pearls of snow,
Crowned with mists of roses white,
Christ—commands them as they go.

ANDREI BIELY

(*For Biographical Note, see p. 54*)

RUSSIA

FLAME, flame, elemental, fiery,
In pillars of thundering fire:
O Russia, my Russia, O Russia,
Rage madly, rage and consume me.

In the crash of your fateful ruins,
In your depths of deepest abyss,
Winged spirits with fluttering hands
Flash visions as piercing as light.

O weep not; but fall on your knees,
Then plunge into hurricane fires,
Into thunders of seraph songs,
Into torrents of cosmic days.

With beams of ineffable eyes,
The Christ that appears will illumine
The vast arid deserts of shame
And seas of unquenchable tears.

And what if the sky hold Saturn,
And the silver of starlit ways,
Seethe, seethe, phosphoric and stormy,
Earth's blazing and fiery shell.

Elemental, in roar of thunders,
Rage madly, rage and consume me,
O Russia, my Russia, O Russia,
Messiah of days that will dawn.

1917.

MAXIMILIAN VOLOSHIN

Maximilian Voloshin was born in 1877, finished the University, lived for long periods in Europe, was a painter and translator of French poets of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. He began publishing in 1901. His own poetry was of the "aesthetic" Symbolist school. After the Revolution, Voloshin published a series of poems about Russia and attempted to consider the events of the day in the light of Russian History. His books of this period are Deaf and Dumb Demons and Poems of the Terror. Voloshin accepted the Revolution as Russian destiny, but remained its detached spectator and died in retirement in 1932.

POEMS OF RUSSIA

THE midnight waters have swollen
And the fury of hurricane crowds
Brings crashing imperial pillars
And shatters the ancient vaults.
And there's no way out, no light. . .
The measure of Time is fulfilled.
Why then does such poignant faith
Overflow and bear me along?
Poor reason is butting a wall,
And yet, to refute it, the Spirit
In a chasm beholds the beams
Of a great and marvellous Sun.

II

Is't I would dare to throw the shameful stone?
Or dare to judge your passion, furious flame?
Oh, I would rather kneel and kiss your mud,
And bless the traces your bare feet have left,
My country, Russia, drunken, dissolute
And vagrant, in the ways of Christ gone mad!

1918.

VELEMIR CHLEBNIKOV

Velemir Chlebnikov was born in 1885; studied at the University, and published his first book of verse in 1913. One of the most individual, curious, and stylistically influential poets of the time. His first verses were met with derision, but exercised an enormous influence on the Futurists, who recognized him as their spiritual leader. Whereas Mayakovsky made a political platform of Futurism, Chlebnikov remained apolitical and was primarily interested in the revival of a poetic language. He died in 1922. Pasternak continues the apolitical tradition. Chlebnikov's work has only lately been critically studied and rehabilitated, but no authoritative critical estimate has yet been made.

THE IMAGE OF REBELLION

"We believe!" bawled bullets and boulevards.
The image of rebellion is manifest to the people.
No brittle picture to crack for a samovar.
The Lord of the pavements painted in yesterday's blood—
on the briars of freshly strewn graves,
on the bandages of the sniping armies,—
looks down from the bulwarks of night
framed in a halo of cobbles;
the Image of an austere God on a grey board,
set there by the hands of the days
and hung in the sight of the city. Pray, O people!

A sing-song shuttle of shots.
Blasts of lead
blow the black night's tocsin
down ravenous streets,
reward windows with beautiful stars.
And the eyes' tears, a bevy of bullets.
And steps that crunch crisply the mirror of snow.

The street-camp screams shots.
Gusts of wind
blow bullets in the ears of shocked boulevards.

A cloud, clamorous, scrambles to rise.
Heaven fills dust-bins with vast constellations.
The poplar we felled just now,
did it crash in a shudder of leaves?
Or tired of bearing the tops,
toppled and buried many and many?
The poplar we felled, the poplar in salvoes
crashed to the ground in a shower of lead leaves
on the crowds on the boulevards
the poplar we felled crashed toppling,
scarring the faces of many with branches of death.
Midnight screams scrape the sky with clangor of iron
and stars croak over the crypt of the roofs.
A night blacker than pitch!
And suddenly—
droves of stars, droves of birds, I had startled,
surge from the earth.

From *LEF*, 1923.

MARINA TSVETAEVA

Marina Tsvetaeva (b. 1892) began her literary activity in 1910. Her first poems are characterized by a strong romantic temperament. After the Revolution she worked out an original poetic style, remarkable for its dynamism, abrupt expressiveness, and innovation. Tsvetaeva's collected verses—Craft, Psyche, After Russia, and some of her popular poems have excited discussion. Tsvetaeva has lived out of Russia since 1922, but her work is really in the line of Soviet literary development, and she has a right to be considered, together with Mayakovsky and Pasternak, as one of the more brilliant poets of contemporary Russia. Her poem, The Separation (1921), symbolizes the spiritual schism of the time, and marked a new step in Tsvetaeva's poetic progress.

THE SEPARATION

I

BATTLE of towers
Somewhere in the Kremlin.
Where on earth is,
Where—

My fortress,
My meekness,
My valour,
My sainthood!

Battle of towers!
Battle abandoned!
Where on earth is—

My house,
My dream,
My laughter,
My light,—
O trace of narrow steps.

Hurled as by hand
Into the night—
Battle—
Abandoned by me!

II

The hands I dropped so long ago
I raise once more.
Through a black empty window
My empty hands
I throw into the midnight battle of the hours.
Home, I cry!
Home, so, headlong!
From the tower! Home!

No crash on the cobbles of the square:
But rippling soft and rustling . . .
That youthful warrior of mine
Under me shall spread his wing.

May 1921.

III

Sheer and more sheer
I wring my hands!
Those are not earthly leagues
Between us now—but Separation's
Heavenly rivers, azure lands,
Where my friend for ages already
Pines in bondage.

The milestones flash by
In harness of silver.
I wring not my hands!
I hold them imploring:
Mute,
As a mountain-ash waving farewell
In the wake of the wedge-winged cranes.

Headlong as cranes race,
Headlong and heedless.
I'll not slow the pace!
In death I shall, exquisite, come,—
Last prop of your gold-flecked speed
In pursuit of space!

June 1921.

IV

With smooth leaves of olive
Hide the head of the bed,
The gods are still jealous
Of mortal love.

They heed every ripple,
Question each rustle;
Know, there are others
To whom the Youth's dear.

The splendour of May
Has lighted a rage.
Be on your guard, then,
Beware the keen sky.

Think you the crags
And the cliffs shall entice him?
Think you it's fame
With her clarion of bronze

That flings him breast-forward
In the thicket of spears?
Do you think he but rises
To fall overwhelmed?

Or think you the dart, then,
Pierced him so deeply?
Imperial mercy's
Worse than disgrace!

Will you weep that at night-time
He strays in the plains?
Fear not the earth-born,
But fear the immortals.

They know every hair
That is caught by a comb;
The gods, as of old-time,
Have a myriad eyes.

Fear not the marshes—
But fear the vast sky-vault.
Insatiable always,
O Jupiter's heart!

v

Softly,
With delicate hand and careful,
I shall unfetter the fetters:
Those tiny hands! But the amazon,
Prompt to the neighing, will rustle
—O Separation!—down your hollow and echoing steps.

The winged one awaits
And stamps and neighs
In radiant space:
And quivering dawn
Surprises the eyes.

O hands, tiny hands!
You call in vain,—
Between streams Lethe's rippling stair.

vi

You'll not see me grown grey,
Nor I when you are tall.
Not a tear shall I wring
From motionless eyes.

Weep for devastation,
And for all your torment;
Draw back your hand, then,
Leave me but your cloak!

Set-faced and passionless,
As a stone-eyed cameo,
I'll not linger at the door

As other mothers linger,
(With full weight of blood,
Of knees and of eyes,—
For the last time only).

As no beast that slinks wounded,
But as stone from a quarry,
I'll step out of the door,
Out of life.
And how shall the tears flow,
Once that this weight
From my shoulders is fallen!

No stone now! but a cloak,
Spreading already its eagle folds,
Streams through impetuous azure
Towards that radiant town,
Whither no mother
Dare take her child!

15th June 1921.

VII

Like a silver bud
It flashed skyward.
Pray,
Zeus may not glimpse it!

The sky's all a-drum
With eagle wings.
Beat, full breast, beat
That he may not steal.

In eagle thunder
—O beak! O blood!—
The tiny lamb hung,
The lamb of love.

O plain-haired woman,
Fall full-breasted . . .
Pray,
Zeus may not steal it.

16th June 1921.

VIII

I know, I know,
That the beauty of earth
Is the beauty of a carved,
Beautiful bowl:
No more ours
Than the air,
Than the stars,
Than the nests,
Hung in the eyries.

I know, I know
Whose the bowl is.
Then forward, foot! Thrust
Like a tower into the eagle heights!
And with your wing sweep down the bowl
From the red and menacing lips
Of God!

MOSCOW, 17th June 1921.

ANNA ACHMATOVA

Anna Achmatova (b. 1888) began to publish in 1907. The poet Gumilev was her first husband. Achmatova's books of love lyrics, The Rosary and The White Flock (1912-15), established her popularity. Their simplicity, their laconic and emotional fullness, were a decided reaction against the Symbolist manner. After the Revolution Achmatova published only one more book, Anno Domini MCMXXI, and then stopped publishing.

ALL IS PLUNDERED

ALL is plundered, betrayed, and sold,
And Death's sable wing hovered near,
And anguish has gnawed to the bone.
Then why has the soul grown so light?

The fabulous wood near the town
Wafts the breath of cherry by day,
And June skies crystal and deep
Light the night with fresh constellations.

And wonder came never so close
To the tumbledown, dirty hovels,
The wonder that nobody knows,
For ages our hope and desire.

1921.

NICOLAI GUMILEV

Nicolai Gumilev (1886–1921) finished the gymnasium and studied at Paris and Petersburg Universities. Travelled a great deal in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Volunteered in 1914. Was executed in 1921 for participation in a counter-revolutionary plot. Gumilev was the head of the “Acmeist” movement which, as against Symbolism, set up a criterion of simplicity, craft, and virility. Gumilev’s poetry is penetrated with exotic motifs, the result of his travels. His best verse is contained in the volumes, Diamonds, The Bonfire, The Tent, The Quiver, and The Fiery Pillar. A meticulous master of verse, Gumilev exercised a considerable formal influence on his contemporaries, and created a whole poetic school. His virile motifs find an echo in the poetry of Nicolai Tikhonov.

YOU AND I

YES, I know we two are no pair,
I am come from another land.
My delight is not the guitar,
But the savage skirl of the pipes.

I hate assemblies and gossip,
Women’s dresses discreet, black coats,
I read my verses to dragons,
Foaming falls and frowning clouds.

When I love, it’s a desert Arab
That drops to the water and drinks;
And no pale knight of a picture,
Who gazes expectant at stars.

Besides, I’ll not die in a bed,
With doctors and lawyers attending,
But thrown in some far-away gorge,
That’s thickly buried in ivy,

To enter no paradise neat,
And protestant, partially-frank,
But where the inveterate sinner,
The wastrel and bandit shout: Rise!

1922.

THE SPIRIT SUN

How could we live such tranquil days,
And hope of life no joy, nor sorrow,
Nor vision battles ardent, great,
Nor dream the trumpets' triumph shrill.

How could we? . . . Still the hour may come!
The Spirit Sun has stooped above us,
The Spirit Sun, to bless and menace,
Has overflowed these skies of ours.

The Spirit, like the rose of May,
Like fire, unfolds and darkness sears:
Whilst body, slow to grasp or see,
Moves blindly in obedience bound.

The wild expanse of gorgeous steppe,
The solitude of forests deep,
No hindrance hold to balk the will;
Nor torment to dismay the soul.

I feel that falling Autumn's due,
And sunlit labours near their end,
When from the tree of Spirit men
Shall pluck the ripened golden fruit.

From *The Quiver*, 1923.

SERGEI ESSENIN

Sergei Essenin (b. 1895) was a peasant by birth, and the village school was all the education he got. A natural lyricist from an early age, he began publishing in 1914, by which time he had come to Petersburg and already attracted attention. By 1920-22 he had become famous as the leader of the "Imagist" movement and as the rowdy chief of the Moscow literary bohemians. He then married Isadora Duncan and made a tour of Europe and America. He finally committed suicide in December 1925. Essenin has left a considerable body of work, most of it purely lyrical and some narrative poems of documentary interest. Some of his best poetry is to be found in the collections, Tavern Moscow and Soviet Russia. He hailed the Revolution with his poem Inonia (1918), in which he prophesied the restoration of village "wooden" Russia. The whole tragedy of Essenin as expressed in his poetry lies in the fact that the industrial policy of the Bolsheviks ruthlessly contradicted his assumption. Essenin came to feel himself like a wild beast, a wolf, tracked and trapped. He took to drink and became a rowdy, but continued to sing elegiac songs in which the tenderest sentiments are mingled with abuse, and in which he prophesied his own death. His dramatic poem, Pugatchev (1921), The Black Man, and Tavern Moscow (1923) illustrate this state of mind. Essenin's popularity was at its zenith in 1923-26 and his poems were often sung. So popular was he that Communist critics were ordered to "combat the disintegrating influence of Esseninism."

THE TRAMP

GROWN weary of my native land,
Of sorrow-breathing, oaten wastes,
I shall forsake my wretched hut
And tramp the roads, a vagrant, thief.

I'll go upon white curves by day
In search of shelter for my head.
And dear-loved friends will welcome me
With knives kept ready for such guests.

The yellow road is woven round
With Spring and Sun spread on the grass,
And she whose name I hold so dear
Will drive me begging from the porch.

Then back to the paternal house,
And with another's joy consoled,
One evening green I'll hang myself
Out of a window on a sleeve.

Grey willows by the wattle-hedge
More tenderly will bow their heads,
And past a choir of barking dogs
They'll bear me to my grave unwashed.

And still the Moon will float and float,
And drop its oars into the lake,
While Russia will live on unchanged
And dance and weep still by the fence.

1916.

THE LAST VILLAGE POET

I AM the last of village poets;
A plank bridge croons but modest songs.
I celebrate the requiem mass
Of censer-swinging leafy birch.

The tallow candle's golden flame
Will burn and dwindle to its death.
The Moon will strike its wooden hours
And snore my twelfth and final hour.

The iron guest will soon appear
And pace the paths of azure fields.
His swarthy hand will snatch away
The oaten sheaves spilled out by dawn.

O hands, your touch is lifeless, strange,
These songs won't live within your reach.
And only ears of corn, like steeds,
Will grieve and mourn their master old.

And, dancing requiem dances, winds
Will suck their mournful quivering neighs.
The Moon will strike its wooden hours
And snore my twelfth and final hour.

1921.

MY MYSTERIOUS WORLD

My mysterious, my ancient world,
Like the wind you have quietened, stilled.
Behold! The stone hands of the road
Have grasped and throttled the village.

And the ringing sorrow in fright
Has fluttered into the blizzard.
Welcome to you, dark destruction,
Alone I'll come out and greet you!

O city, your merciless grip
Has penned us like carrion and dirt.
Fields cool in the ooze of sorrow,
Oppressed by the telegraph poles.

The devilish imp's strong-muscled,
And faggots of iron are easy.
What then? We shall not be the first
To wander away and get lost.

O, welcome to you, beast beloved,
Not in vain you yield to the knife.
Like you, I'm pursued on all sides,
Run the gauntlet of iron foes.

Like you, I am always prepared,
And hearing the triumphant horn,
My last mortal leap will yet try
To taste of the enemy blood.

And what if I fall in the storm,
And am buried in mounds of snow . . .
On the other shore will be sung
The song of revenge for my death.

Let the heart be gripped in suspense,
That's the song of animal rights!
. . . That's how hunters quarry the wolf
And grip it in jaws of the beast.

The beast's cornered; and now from the depths
A trigger is ready to pull . . .
The beast leaps, and its fierce tusks tear
And devour the two-legged foe.

1923.

TAVERN MOSCOW

YES, now it's decided! For ever
My home and my fields I've forsaken.
The poplars no longer will sound
Their flying leaves over my head.
My hovel will crumble without me,
And my old dog died long ago.
God, on Moscow's contorted streets,
Fated my death without doubt.
But I love this town, be it muddy,
Be it tawdry, decrepit, decayed.
Asia, drowsy, and golden,
Sleeps on its gilded domes.
And when the moon shines out,
Shines . . . the devil knows how!
I go with my head weighed down

Through a lane to a tavern I know.
Screaming and noise in that den,
And all the night through till dawn,
I read my verses to whores
And brew spirit with bandits.
The heart beats faster and faster,
Already I falter and say:
"Like you, I am one of the lost.
For me there is no going back."
My hovel will crumble without me,
And my old dog died long ago.
God, on Moscow's contorted streets,
Fated my death without doubt.

II

Once more they quarrel and cry,
To the sombre accordeon's wail,
And remembering Muscovite Russia,
They endlessly curse their lot.
My head droops lower and lower
And I drown my eyes in the wine
To avoid looking fate in the face,
To think of things for a moment.
Oh, Russia is merry to-day!
The home-brew flows in a river!
The sunken-nosed accordeon-player
Sings of the Volga and the Tcheka.
There's spite in their insane gaze,
And their speech is proud and unbroken.
They regret the foolish and young
Who wasted their life for a passion.
They regret that unsparing October
Misled them in merciless blizzards,
And with fresh daring they've sharpened
The knives they conceal in their boots.
Where are you who have left us behind?
Do our beams shine brightly upon you?
With vodka the accordeon-player

Cures the pox of the Kirghiz steppes.
No! Such people can never be scattered!
Decay makes them wilder still!
You, Russia . . . my Rus—sia,
Asiatic land.

III

Play, accordeon, play! Boredom, boredom . .
The player's fingers flash as waves.
Drink with me, mangy bitch,
Drink with me.
You've been fingered and soiled
Past all bearing!
What are you goggling at
With those blue sparks of eyes?
Do you want a black eye?
You're only fit for a scarecrow.
And you won't leave me in peace.
Play, accordeon! Play, my unending!
And you, bitch, come drink, drink!
I'd much rather have the one with the bubs,
She's more stupid.
You're not the first woman.
There's a crowd of you.
But it's the first time
With a bitch like you.
Sting well and resoundingly, pain!
Here or there, what's the odds.
But I'll not put an end to my days.
Go to hell.
It's time to cool off
Towards your dog's pack. . . .
Dearest . . . I'm crying . . .
Forgive me . . . forgive me. . . .

IV

Sing! On that cursed guitar
 Your fingers dazzle and dance.
 Could we but choke in these fumes,
 My only and faithful friend!
 Don't look at her quivering bangles.
 Or her shoulders' shimmering silk.
 Joy I sought in that woman,
 But found my ruin instead.
 I knew not love's a contagion,
 I knew not love is a plague.
 She came up with narrowing eyes
 And drove the hooligan mad.
 Sing, Sandro! Sing once again
 Our former riotous youth!
 Let the worn-out, beautiful trash
 Go and make love to another!
 But, stay! I won't blame her.
 But stay! I won't curse her.
 Oh, let me but sing of myself
 To the twang of those strings in travail. . . .
 My days' rose cupola shimmers,
 And my heart's full of golden dreams.
 How many girls I have fondled,
 How many women embraced!
 Yes! There's one bitter truth on earth,
 I spied with the eye of a child
 How dogs sniff a bitch in turn.
 So why should I be jealous?
 Why should I grow sick at heart?
 Our life's but a sheet and a bed!
 Our life's but a kiss and oblivion!
 Sing, then, sing! These hands' fateful swing
 Hold all fated misfortune. . . .
 Only be sure . . . send them to hell . . .
 But never, my friend, shall I die.

SECTION II

REVOLUTIONARY AND PROLETARIAN POETS

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1894-1930) was educated at a gymnasium and later studied painting. His literary activity dates from 1911, when he met Burliuk and Chlebnikov and helped them to compose the Futurist manifesto, A Slap on the Face to Public Taste (1912). Mayakovsky was now writing steadily, and in 1917 he published one of his best poems, The Cloud in Trousers (1916), and his War and Peace poems, in which he took up a revolutionary and anti-militarist attitude. After the Revolution Mayakovsky organized the LEF (Left Front), which was equivalent to "Futurism at the service of the Revolution," and issued his Commands to the Arts Armies, 1918. His revolutionary poems include Mystery Bouffe (1918), his Messianic 150,000,000 (1920), Lenin, October, The Flying Proletariat, as well as a multitude of satires, parodies, and agitpoems, and the plays, The Bug and The Bath-House. Over half a million copies of Mayakovsky's works have been published. Mayakovsky, who was an active member of the Bolshevik Party from the age of fourteen, and who gave up all his energies and talent to the revolutionary cause, committed suicide in 1930 because of an unfortunate love affair. His suicide, coming as it did after the pains he took to contradict Essenin's dying words, was both a loss and a tremendous shock to Soviet literature.

I

ON the pavement
of my trampled soul
the soles of madmen
stamp the prints of rude, crude words.
Where cities
hang,
and in the noose
of clouds

the towers'
crooked spires
congeal,
I go
and solitary weep
that cross-roads
crucify
policemen.

LISTEN!

LISTEN!

If stars are lit,
does it mean they're necessary to someone?
Does it mean someone desires they should be?
Does it mean someone calls these spittles pearls?

And lashed
in the scourge of noonday dust,
afraid of being late,
he rushes in where God is,
weeps,
kisses his gnarled hands,
prays for—
—an unfailing star!—
swears
he could not bear this starless torment.
And afterwards,
struts about suspicious
under a veneer of calm.
Tells someone:
“You're all right now?
Not afraid?
Yes?”

Listen!

If stars
are lit,
does it mean they're necessary to someone?

Does it mean it's indispensable
that every night
one star at least
should kindle over roofs?

1913.

THE CLOUD IN TROUSERS

PROLOGUE

YOUR thought,
that muses on a sodden brain,
as a fattened lackey on a greasy couch,
I shall taunt with my heart's bloody tatters;
sate my insolent, caustic contempt.

Not a single grey hair streaks my soul,
not a trace of grandfatherly fondness!
I shake the world with the might of my voice
and stalk—handsome,
twentytwoyearold.

Fond souls!
You fiddle sweet loves,
but the crude club their love on a drum.
Try, as I do, and wrench
yourself inside out and be just engulfing lips!

Come and be lessoned—
prim graduates of the angel league,
from boudoirs lipping in cambric !

You who tranquilly finger your lips
as cooks page a cookery book.

If you like,
I shall berserk rage on raw meat!
Or as the sky varies its tints,
if you like,

I shall grow irreproachably fond,
not a man, but—a cloud in trousers!

I don't believe in flowery Nice!
I sing once again
men as crumpled as hospital beds,
and women as trite as a proverb.

1915

BROTHER WRITERS

It seems, I shall never grow accustomed
to sitting in the "Bristol,"
drinking tea,
lying by the line,—
I shall upset the glasses,
clamber on the table
"Listen,
literary brothers!
You sit,
eyes drowning in tea,
your velvet elbows worn with scribbling.
Raise your eyes from the unemptied glasses!
Disentangle your ears from those shaggy locks!
Darlings,
what wedded you to words,
you who sit glued
to walls
and wall-paper?
Do you know
that François Villon,
when he finished writing,
did his job of plundering?
And you,
who quake at the sight of a penknife,
boast yourselves guardians of a splendid age.
What have you to write about to-day?
Any solicitor's assistant finds

life
a hundred times more interesting.
Gentlemen poets,
have you not tired
of pages,
palaces,
love
and lilac blooms?
If such as you
are the creators,
then I spit upon all art.
I'd rather open a shop,
or go on the Stock Exchange
and bulge my sides with fat wallets.
In a tavern rear
I'll spew up my soul
in a drunken song.
Will the blow tell,
cleave through your sheaves of hair?
But you've only one idea
under that mop of hair:
to comb! And why?
For a while, it's not worth the labour
and to be eternally
combed
is impossible."

COMMAND NO. I

BRIGADES of dodderers spin
the same old yarns.
Comrades,
To the barricades!
The barricades of hearts and souls!
True Communists
burn their bridges of retreat.
Enough of marching, Futurists,
Into the future leap!

It's not enough to build a locomotive,—
with a whir of wheels it's gone.

And if a station's mum of song,
what's the use of alternating currents!

Sound on sound heap

and forward,

singing and whistling.

There are still sound letters left:

Ars

and Esses.

It's not enough to form in fours,

or trim a pair of trousers with an edging.

All the sovdeps¹ won't rouse armies

if the musicians don't strike up a march.

Drag the grand-pianos into the street,
from windows drums bombard.

Drum,

or grand wide open,

noise anyway,

and thunder.

It's no life to strain in factories,

walk about with sooty face

and for holiday

with weary hang-dog eyes

applaud another's luxury.

Enough of ha'penny truths,

erase the past from your heart!

Streets are our brushes

squares our palettes.

The days of Revolution

are unsung as yet

by the thousand-paged

Book of Time.

On the streets, Futurists,

drummers and poets!

Communal Art, No. 1, 7th December 1918.

¹ Sovdeps—soviet deputies.

HANDS OFF CHINA!

(Agitverse)

WAR,
 daughter of imperialism,
 stalks,
 a spectre through the world.
 Workers, roar: Hands off China!—
 Hey, Macdonald,
 don't meddle
 in leagues and muddle speeches.
 Back, dreadnoughts!
 Hands off China!—
 In the embassy quarters
 kings meticulously
 sit, weaving a web of intrigues.
 We'll brush away the cobweb.
 Hands off China!—
 Coolie,
 enough of dragging them, cool, in rickshaws,
 straighten your back.
 Hands off China!
 They want to pulverize
 you
 with a colony.
 400 millions,
 you're no drove.
 Louder, Chinese:
 Hands off China!—
 Time you drove
 these drivers out,
 dropping them off the wall of China.
 Pirates of the world,
 Hands off China!—
 Were glad
 to help
 all enslaved

to fight,
teaching
and providing.
We're with you, Chinamen!
Hands off China!
Workers,
rout the robber
night, fire as a rocket
your fiery slogan:
Hands off China!

1927.

NICOLAI TIKHONOV

(*For Biographical Note, see p. 204*)

POEM

WE have unlearnt to give to beggars,
To breathe the salt deep of the sea,
To meet the dawn and buy in shops
For copper trash the gold of lemons.

Ships only come to us by chance,
Whilst rails from habit roll their loads;
Count over the people of my land:
How many dead will rise on call?

We laugh triumphant in our scorn:
A broken knife's no good for work,
Yet with this black and broken knife
Immortal pages have been cut.

From *The Horde*, 1922.

THE HORSES

TAKE a look at those useless planks—
The horses have shattered the camp!
Do you hear the dull, distant blasts?
The mine-sweepers went out to sea
And have left clogged rivers to ice.

What? Am I no sailor, no rider,
To sleep unawaking? Read books?
Or scatter the seeds on the sill?
Ah! I'm no lover of birds,
And require a different book. . . .

Life lessoned with rifle and oar;
Strong winds blew my shoulders about,
And lashed with ropes knotted and hard,
'To make me more skilled and reserved
And plain as the iron of nails.

So I trust the tottering deck,
The spirited mounts of hussars,
The casual travelling tent,
And love that is spendthrift and brief,
A love I invented myself.

From *The Horde*, 1922.

ILYA SELVINSKY

Ilya Selvinsky (b. 1899) received a secondary education. He fought in the Civil War. He drew attention to himself with a number of poems in which he attempted to image the revolutionary epic and to introduce rhythmical innovations. He founded "Constructivism," which attempted to give Soviet literature a "plan," and which, in 1929-30, rallied a number of poets to a programme of active support of the Soviets and of positive poetry. At one moment Selvinsky looked like taking Mayakovsky's place. His chief works are Pushtorg (1929), and a lyrical play, Pao-Pao (1932), which is the story of an Ape (symbol of the low and animal instincts, and of bourgeois culture), which becomes "human" upon discovering the true ideology in the harmonious environment of a factory.

THE GOLDEN MELODY

PAO (*speaking*):

These are the shadows reflected now
Of things that promise from distant glades.

Next. "The Criticism of the Gotha Programme":
"Work is but suffering. But. With Communism.
It will merge. With Creation. One. Perfectly knit.
Become. A primary necessity. Of life.

(*Ponders*)

You may as well know how things happen!
When one tinkers with wireless sets,
Chaos, torrents of tumult burst in,
Cosmic contortions and riots;
Then piercing these elephant-trumpets,
This howling and milling of mills,
Come faint strains . . . you might say from the Moon.
. . . Strains of a lyrical melody.
So, through a concert of cat-calls,
Through desperate screeching, forged letters,
U.S.S.R. rings with the ring
Of golden Socialist melody.

And snorting, Chaos doubles the din,
And trebles its endless abuse.
But they will not drown this lyrical ring,
They will not drown it! Isn't that so?
They can't drown this lyrical ring,
This true reflex of liberty won,
Ancient, savage, and painfully ours,
By capitalism gnawed all bare. . . .
I thought to find it in ringing gold,
In the clang of kisses (pure, impure).
I thought of it as of some vast Sun,
To be owned like any gold watch.
I chased it through fashions of cities,
I chased it as far as Tahiti,
And at last understood this ring
Only here, in this country and mill!
As grey granite grows veined with pale gold,
So grey work swells and puffs out its veins,
Throbbing big with the voice of the pulse.
It outgrows the frame of professions;
It is work and not work. It sweats lyrics.
Here hammer on hammer beats rhythm.
And veins spread in finest of networks. . . .

From *Pao-Pao*, 1932.

NICOLAI USHAKOV

Nicolai Ushakov (b. 1899). The Spring of the Republic is his best book of poems. A young proletarian poet of primarily lyrical nature, but with a "Socialist" ideology and a style evolved from Mayakovsky.

KARABASH

FAMILIAR as an ancient landscape:
a humble alder-tree across the ploughed fields
and stragglers

then suddenly

a *zavcom*

and the red August of Karabash.
Here the lake's ruffled silk
pants by the dam
in tangled sedge;
and from a shed an engine puffs
and raucous hails the wind.

Guffaws out of the darkness dense,
where midnight
in a knot of mystery binds
the screeching of the incessant saw
and the light
that twinkles from the station side.

And sulphur warms the air
that hovers over all
our mind holds precious,
over the excavations
that gleam in hues of oil,
and over the grave
where the partisan lies buried.

Over all that warms as blood
and makes
no boast of poverty.

O my obstinate country,
be neither
hypocrite
nor pauper.

December 1932.

A. BEZIMENSKY

(*For Biographical Note, see p. 274*)

A POEM ABOUT LOVE

(PART I)

HAVE you known
 how to live
 through such things and bear it?
The heart
 quivers,
 like a tear,
in the body.

The fourteenth of April
 gapes,
 bulging its eyes

The calendar. . . .
 But were those years
Measured
 with the leaf of the calendar?

That year
 worked
 like a century,
Refashioning
 and creating.

That year
 speeded
the flight of the age.
Live, Man!
Work!

Build!
 Create!

What signified then
 for the age
 this shot,
 at No. 3 Lubyanskaya Street?

Mayakovsky!
 The sum has been added
 but the justification is lacking.
 A bullet
 means a deal
 in the life of a man,
 But *nothing*
 in the life of an age.

No-thing!
 That's—nihil . . .
 Zero. . . .

Your life, that fabulous tower,
 Stood up on stilts of mere straw.

Cursed stilts of old-fashioned feelings,
 Thrust in your way by the old world!

I don't know
 if I'll find words enough
 to equal in violence and force
 the hatred
 of masses.

But I want them,
 here and now,
 to command
 any word:
 “Hack!”

That the days,
 and the years,
 and the centuries
 Might be cleansed
 of the shame of suicides.

Unbending
 and strong,
 your hard voice
Struck at those who still secreted Hamlet.
But, Mayakovsky,
 you yourself secreted
that son of a bitch,
 Dante.

14th April-30th September 1931.

SECTION C

A POET AND THE REVOLUTION

BORIS PASTERNAK

Boris Pasternak (b. 1890), the son of a painter academician, finished the gymnasium and studied philosophy at the University of Moscow and in Germany. His literary activity begins in 1913, but fame came to him after the Revolution. His verse is contained in the following collections, Over the Barriers (1914-16), My Sister Life (1922), Themes and Variations (1923), Year 1905 (1927), Spectorsky, and The Second Birth (1932). He has also published two prose works, The Childhood of Luvers (1925), and Safety Conduct (1931). Pasternak occupies a somewhat special and isolated position in Soviet poetry. A revolutionary in poetry, Pasternak does not venture on political rhetoric, and throughout preserves a great independence of mind and the integrity of his verse. This latter, though apolitical, and for that reason often the bane of Communist critics, represents a high expression of contemporary intelligence and symbolizes the dynamism, flux, and highest aspirations of the epoch. Pasternak is one of the very few contemporary poets who have achieved a fine balance between intellect and emotion and who can satisfy both the mind and the heart. His poetry depends upon the integration of emotion, in terms of unusual mental association, into a dynamic and verbally musical associative whole. The spontaneity of the verb and the inexhaustible faculty of association make of his poetry the very source of poetry. Pasternak's formal influence has naturally been considerable. Communist critics still attack him for his aloofness. But Pasternak remains the most considerable living Soviet poet.

WEAVE THIS SHOWER

WEAVE this shower, like waves of cold elbows,
Like lilies, satin and strong, with powerless palms!
Away, exult! Into the open! Hold them! For, in this furious
 race,
There's the clamour of woods, choked with the echo of hunts in
 Calydon,

Where, like a roe, heedless, Actæon pursued Atalant atowards
the glade,
Where they loved in profoundest azure that whistled by the ears
of the horses,
And kissed in the impetuous baying of chase,
And caressed in the peals of the horn, the crackling of trees,
hooves and claws.
Oh! Into the open! Into the open!—Like those!

1918.

SPRING

SPRING! I'm from the street, where the poplar stands amazed,
Where the distance takes fright, where the house fears to fall,
Where the air is all blue, like the linen bundle
Of a patient just discharged from a hospital.

Where the evening's vacant, like an interrupted story,
Left in an asterisk without any sequel
To the suspense of a thousand clamouring eyes,
Bereft of expression grown deeply abysmal.

1918.

STARS SWARMED

STARS swarmed. Promontories splashed the sea.
Salt blinded. Tears were drying up.
Bedrooms plunged in darkness. Thoughts swarmed.
The Sphinx listened to the Sahara.

Tapers swam. And it seemed the blood
Of corn congealed. And lips dissolved
Into a desert smile of blue.
Night ebbd in the tide's sinking hour.

Winds from Morocco stirred the sea
Simooms roared. Archangel snored in snows.
Tapers swam. The Prophet's herb was drying,
And on the Ganges dawned the day.

1918.

DO NOT TOUCH

"Do not touch, the paint is fresh!"
The soul paid no heed;
Memory's in stains of cheeks,
Calves, hands, lips, and eyes.

More than all success or grief,
For this I loved you,
That the white light, yellow-grown,
Whiter flamed in you.

And I fear, my friend, my gloom
Will somehow whiter
Grow than fever, lampshade, or white
Bandage round the head.

MAY LIFE BE ALWAYS FRESH!

THE dawn will fan the candle-flame,
Will set a blaze and start the wren.
O memory, with you I fly:
May life be always fresh as fresh!

Day breaks, a shot into the dark,
Crrack-crackcrck! And swoons in swooping flight
The blaze of rifle wad on fire.
May life be always fresh as fresh!

Outside a frail wind hesitates,
Night drove it shivering to our door.
But dawn brought drizzle, it chilled the more.
May life be always fresh as fresh!

I am bewildered at its silly sense!
Why so insistent with the guard?
Was it not clear the gate was barred?
May life be always fresh as fresh:

Be wilful—whilst a handkerchief's
To wave, whilst still a lady in you walk,
Whilst still in darkness prisoned we,
Whilst wavering fire fails to swoon.

1919.

WE ARE FEW

WE are few. Perhaps we are three,
From the Don, burning and desperate,
Close under the grey running bark
Of the rains, of clouds and soldiers'
Soviets, discussions, and verses
About means of transport and art.

We were people. Now we are epochs.
Were swept, and are caravan-spiced
As tundra by sighs of the tender
And the panting of pistons and rails.
We'll swoop, break the barriers and touch,
We'll whirl in a whirlwind of crows,

And past! You will gasp when too late.
Thus striking at daybreak heaped straw
—Instantly tossed in confusion—
The wind's still eternal in talks
Of the trees' storm-roused assembly
Loud over the mouldering thatch.

1921.

STORM AT SEA

(FROM 1905)

PALLS,
in time,
everything.
Only you
have no chance,

washed in the welter of days
and of years
and of ages
in the white rage
of the waves
in the white trance
of acacias.
Perhaps it is you,
sea,
make such wilderness sages?

Throned
on a mountain of nets,
beatifically smiling,
yet
frisky as spring.
Idle breeze.
That fugitive lock,
waving
from brow
or from prow.
Or for paddling babes beguiling—
till the trumpet
of tyrant tempest
and the frothy
toss-up for dock.

Then
all the picture-postcard illusions
are disintegrated
under a sky
of livid suspicion
and hate,
as the sea,
like a primeval monster,
gets hoarse
in its maniac hatred,
and, toothed
with ravenous breakers,
crumbles the stones of the quay.

And
sails that were bunt
Are huddled to shivering bone;
and the summer
of colour's
a simmering cauldron
of sullied water
o'er the welter
of which
crouch
the dark heavens
groaning,
and finger
the fringe
of the flinching world
with clamorous gulls.

There they come
clumsily labouring
through the mill of infernal
chaos of cloud
and gasp into port.
The heavens,
bellied and bursting,
shatter and spill
serpents of flame
west
south
east
and north.

What an idyllic scene,
with the evening crabs
slowly stirring
from shelter,
and trees of the bay
drawn in by the sun
to its funeral
whirlpool
of ripples

murmuring love
and stippling
with rusty rash
the flushed hulk
and its guns.

H.M.S. *Potyomkin*
at the ebb
of a tropic stew,
aglow.
The ambience?
A myriad galley-flies
in perpetual chorus
and as audience
the crew.
But why?
Oh, nothing
a bagatelle
merely
the lower-deck butchery
high.

But
in the silence
the slim land breeze
scudded cooling
the good ship *Potyomkin* ;
and
ranked in glittering pride
her portholes
pitted
the darkness ;
and
sleeplessly
brooded
till
at glimmer of daybreak
they faltered
and shuddered
and died.

Thick-knotted
—the caressing fingers
of the morning swell;
were mercury razors
sliding clean
from the shining hulk.
To swab at the decks
or pray
to the bid of a bell,
the dreadnought crew
wakened;
proceeded
from night
to daytime
sulk.

Nor would look at their skilly
but
gulped dry bread
nor sit down
but shuffled in groups
till
One
in immaculate white
All hands
(bellows)
on deck.
Purple under his brown,
hells
seven hundred;
perfectly sure
he is right.

Dissatisfied?
What?
To your places!
But not a man stirred
till password
or haphazard impulse

flung them
like silly children
to capture
the stronghold of the guns
nor even heard,
some of them,
the railing
of the raging
Lord God of the Skilly.

Don't be silly bs,
he yelled.
And some of them
did pause
in the hell
of his fire
with
a servile flutter of gladness
while
the other poor blighters
took their pitiful stand
in the maws
of the gun-towers
and thought
of the hideous price to be paid
for their madness.

There were fluttering hearts
and hard faces
till
howl or a whine
broke from one
in his agony:
What's the odds
what's their game
who'd stand it
let's be our own masters
let's batter the swine!
and out from the turret
leapt the men

like
avenging venturesome flames.

Then
crackling and spurting
sped the fire
from the deck to the bridge;
and netted the dreadnought
with rockets outshining the sun
and knotted the air
with the racket.
You bloody midge!
and
t-t-tap—tap tap
as they spotted
and potted
them off
on the run.

T-t-tap
as the bullets
spattered
the spick and span
steel,
or filliped
the foam
as they followed
their prey
to the waves.
Where?
Still aboard.
And they found
the flaw
in his heel,
and flung his cadaver
with an order
to inspect the Port Arthur graves.

But
down by the turbulent

turbines
none
could believe it,
till,
like a stalker,
Matushenko
peered into the pit,
picked out
the lay of the land,
then beckoned
to Steve
calling
Steve
Okay Steve okay
we've bloody well done it.

Steve
clambered up to him
embraced him
laughing
declaring:
We'll do without ninnies.
Shh!
Under guard.
And the rest
larded with lead
or in pickle.
But we must be wary—
say—
what about your engineers—
only one?
Send him up—dressed.

But
that day
must come
to a close,
to see them at dusk.
Smoke
curtains the vessel,

makes modest
the rating who booms
(rating as captain to ratings)
Stand by.
Hides the hustle
as they ominously turn
to Odessa,
forging
a furrow
of doom.

1927.

THE POET

HAD I but known of things in store,
How lines with viscous blood can kill,
Can kill and take the throat by storm,
And had, untried, my débuts still,

I'd said a categoric "no"
To jokes with this dread spore of all,
But to begin was far to go,
And timid early passion's call.

But age is Rome again, the same
That in return for gossip fleet
Demands no actor's bid for fame,
But death ungrudging and complete.

And when its feelings lines dictate,
They send a slave upon the stage,
And here breathe only soil and fate,
For art dies consummate with rage.

From *The Second Birth*, 1932.

CRITICISM

SOVIET CRITICISM

This Section includes a selection of literary documents and critical passages intended to give the reader some idea of the theoretical principles underlying the development of Soviet Literature in the last fifteen years and of some of the schools of critical thought which have influenced this development and of the more important changes of policy which have occurred since 1918.

THE Revolution undermined the foundations of æsthetic, impressionistic, and religious-philosophical criticism which had predominated till 1917. Precedence was now given to Sociological and Marxist criticism, which examined literary works in the light of social and economic evolution.

Older Marxist critics, like Fritche (*The Sociology of Art and Literature and Marxism*, 1928) and P. Kogan (*The Literature of these Years and Proletarian Literature*), who had already made a name for themselves before the Revolution, now stepped into the limelight. Fritche, Kogan, Lvov Rogatchevsky and Ievgenyi Maximov formed a group of so-called "Orthodox" Marxist critics. To this group, likewise, belongs Bogdanov, the author of *Art and the Working Classes* and the theoretician of the Proletcult.

New tendencies manifest themselves in the course of subsequent disputes about art and the character of proletarian literature.

A group of moderate Communist critics formed what became the "right wing" of Marxist criticism. Its chiefs were Trotsky (*Literature and Revolution*, 1923), Voronsky (*Art and Life and Literary Portraits*), a prominent critic and editor of *Krasnaya Nov*, the leading Soviet literary review, Lezhnev, Viatcheslav Polonsky, and, partly, the Minister of Education, Lunacharsky.

Futurism developed its own critical direction, the LEF (Left Front). Its theoreticians—Brik, Mayakovsky and Asseyev—demanded "the inclusion of literature in life" and the application of the principle of social utility. While Mayakovsky and Asseyev formed the "left," Brik and the Formalists formed the "right" wing of this movement. The LEF critics, though

revolutionaries, came into frequent conflict with Marxist and Proletarian critics, and their movement, after many tribulations, lost much of its force and importance by 1930.

The "On Guard" group, formed in 1923, suffered many modifications. It united those champions of proletarian literature who believed in the inevitability of its hegemony. But these "sentinels" themselves differed in their æsthetic appreciations and in their conceptions of Proletarian literary methods. There were constant disputes, and by 1928 the "On Guard" group had split up into several minor groups. Among the "On Guard" critics we may note Lelevitch, Rodov, and Gorbachev. From its ranks, too, emerged that group of writers and critics which, under the leadership of Averbakh, Kirshon, and Bespalov, assumed control of the literary organizations in 1930-32, during the period of the Five-Year Plan dictatorship in literature, and which waged a battle for a hundred per cent. Communist literature. This school of "uncompromising" dictator-critics suffered a set-back by the Central Committee Resolution of April 1932.

Next to these fundamentally Marxist schools of criticism we may note two other currents in criticism.

One of them, known under the name of its founder, Professor Pereverzev, became the object of savage attack on the part of orthodox critics. Pereverzev argued that literature was a direct and immediate expression of the productive process, and that an author's class is manifest in his imagery, which symbolized the same economic laws. Pereverzev was accused of "vulgarizing Marxism."

The Formalists, or the exponents of the "formal method," had, for the most part, originally belonged to a number of philological and scientific groups (such as the OPOYAZ—Society for Study of Poetic Speech) centred in Petrograd, and devoted chiefly to investigation of poetic speech and problems of style. The majority of these theoreticians were the disciples of the famous Russian savants, Potebny and Veselovsky. The Formalists—Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, Tomashevsky, Tynyanov, and Brik, among others—asserted that a given work of art was but "the sum of the devices employed therein," and that "form creates its content." A writer's literary devices and stylistic peculiarities are the manifestations of his individuality, and

hence the study of these devices forms a real problem of literary criticism, whose function it is to demonstrate *how* a given work is compounded.

The formal method, which was cleverly and originally elaborated by its theoreticians, gained at one time wide currency, and considerably influenced Russian criticism. In 1928, however, Formalism was proclaimed to be "idealistic" and injurious, and war was declared upon it. Though checked in its open manifestations, Formalism persists as a strong influence, particularly in the sphere of historico-literary investigation, and still has a body of adherents made up, for the most part, of young Soviet literary historians.

M. S.

FUTURISM

Russian Futurism, which dates from 1912, represents not only a literary reaction against Symbolism, but also heralds the triumph of the revolutionary spirit. Futurism united two types of artist—the purely literary revolutionary, the innovator, and the politically conscious innovator, who justified his literary innovations by his aims of social reconstruction. This latter permitted Futurism to place itself in the vanguard of revolutionary art in 1918, when it became the LEF (Left Front). The LEF, however, never became identified with proletarian art, and remained the stronghold of revolutionary intellectuals, whose left wing included Mayakovsky and Asseyev, and whose right—the Formalists.

A SLAP ON THE FACE TO PUBLIC TASTE

FOR readers Our New First and Unexpected.

We alone are the face of our Time. We are the mouthpiece of the times in literature.

The past is stifling. The Academy and Pushkin are incomprehensible hieroglyphs.

We must throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., from the boat of contemporaneity.

Who forgets not his first love will not recognize his last.

Who's simpleton enough to turn his last love into a perfumed Balmont whore? Would she reflect the virile soul of to-day?

Who's coward enough to fear to tear the paper armour off Briusov's black frock-coat? Or does it hold the promise of inscrutable beauties?

Wash your hands which have become soiled paging the filthy slime of books scribbled by numberless Leonid Andreyevs.

All these Maxim Gorkys, Kuprins, Bloks, Sologubs, Remizovs, Avertchenkos, Chernyis, Kuzmins, Bunins, etc., etc., would be satisfied with a cottage in the country. That's how destiny rewards tailors.

We behold their insignificance from the top of skyscrapers.

We command respect for the poets' right:

(1) To enlarge the dictionary with arbitrary and derivative words. (The word as innovation.)

- (2) To uncompromising hatred for the language preceding them.
- (3) To spurn and abhor your worthless laurel of fame.
- (4) To stand upon the clod of the word "we" in a sea of cat-calls and indignation.

And if our lines still show the traces of the filthy stamp of your "sense" and "good taste," yet the first Lightings of a New and Dawning Beauty of an Intrinsically-Precious Word are already quivering upon them.

Moscow, *December* 1912.

Signed—

D. BURLIUK.

ALEXANDER KRUTCHENYI.

V. MAYAKOVSKY.

VICTOR CHLEBNIKOV.

THE PROLETARIAT AND ART

The resolution proposed by A. Bogdanov at the First All-Russian Conference of Proletarian Cultural-Educational Organizations on the 20th of September 1918.

(1) ART by means of living images organizes social experience not only in the sphere of knowledge, but also in that of feelings and aspiration. It is consequently one of the most powerful instruments for the organization of collective forces and of class forces in a class society.

(2) A class art of its own is indispensable to the Proletariat for the organization of its forces for social work, struggle, and construction. Labour collectivism—such is the spirit of this art, which ought to reflect the world from the point of view of the labour collective—expresses the complex of its feeling and its militant and creative will.

(3) The treasures of ancient art must not be absorbed passively; otherwise they would educate the working class in the spirit of the ruling classes and in a spirit of acquiescence to a social order of their creation. The Proletariat must examine the treasures of ancient art in the light of its new critical doctrine, which reveals their secret collective foundations and their organizational significance. They will then prove a precious inheritance for the Proletariat and a weapon in its fight against that ancient world which created them, and an instrument for the building up of a new world. It is the task of Proletarian criticism to assure this artistic heritage.

(4) All organizations, all institutions, devoted to the development of the new art and the new criticism, ought to be formed upon a basis of comradely collaboration, which would directly educate its workers in the ways of social aspiration.

(Carried unanimously.)

THE SERAPION BROTHERS

The "Serapion Brothers" was a literary group founded in 1921 under the patronage of Maxim Gorky. It included as various writers as Vs. Ivanov and Fedin, Zoshtchenko and Tikhonov, Kaverin and Shklovsky. This group played an important part in restoring normal literary activity after a period of chaos and disorder and in bringing together older and experienced writers like Zamyatin and Shklovsky with young writers who, demobilized from the Red Armies, were now determined to pursue a literary career. The stress, too, which Zamyatin and Shklovsky, the teachers of the Serapion Brothers, laid upon the formal and technical aspects of art, and the non-political attitude assumed by the "Brothers," which is clearly stated in the Manifesto printed below, served in good stead the cause of artistic integrity at a moment when political pressure was bearing very hardly upon all forms of art.

(The following is an extract from their Manifesto published in August 1922 and signed by Lev Lunts.)

The Serapion Brothers is a novel by Hoffmann. We write, then, in the manner of Hoffmann; we are, then, the school of Hoffmann.

That is what anyone would conclude upon hearing about us. But the same person would ask, on reading our anthology or any of our stories: "What have they in common with Hoffmann? And to begin with, they show but little sign of being any one school or direction. Each one of them writes in his own way."

That is so. We are no school; no direction; no band of Hoffmann imitators.

And that is why we have called ourselves the Serapion Brothers.

Lothar jeers at Othmar: "Shall we not state what subjects we may or may not discuss? Shall we not compel each one of us to recount three unfailing spicy anecdotes, or shall we not order one invariable sardine salad for dinner? That would be the best way of sinking in a mire of philistinism the equal of which can only be found in clubs. Don't you understand that every predetermined condition drags in its wake compulsion and boredom, which engulf all pleasure?"

We called ourselves the Serapion Brothers because we object to compulsion and boredom, and because we object to everybody writing in the same way, even though it were in imitation of Hoffmann.

Each of us has his own distinct physiognomy and outlook upon literature. Each one of us exhibits the traces of the most varied literary influences. "Each of us has his own drum," Nikitin declared at our first gathering.

Nor are the six Hoffmann brothers all twins or all of a stature. Silvester is quiet, modest, and silent; Vincent, furious, uncontrollable, inconstant, and fiery. Lothar is obstinate, quarrelsome, and a grumbler; Ciprian, a meditative mystic; Othmar is bitterly scornful; while, finally, Theodor, the master, is a tender father and friend to his brothers, imperceptibly guiding this wild group, and kindling and extinguishing their disputes.

And there are so many points of dispute. The Serapion Brothers are no school or tendency. They attack one another and are in eternal disputation, and that is why we have called ourselves the Serapion Brothers.

In February 1921, at a time of widespread regimentation, registration, and barrack-room regulations, when but a single iron and boring statute was made applicable to all, we decided to foregather without statutes or chairmen, without elections or voting. Together with Theodor, Othmar, and Ciprian, we believed that the "character of our gatherings would delineate itself, and we took an oath to remain true to the very end to the statute of the anchorite Serapion."

. . . We think that present-day Russian literature is amazingly decorous, conceited, and monotonous. We are allowed to write stories, novels, and compulsory dramas in both the old and new styles, but only provided that they are social and inevitably upon contemporary themes.

We demand but one thing: that a work of art be organic and real, and that it live its own peculiar life.

LEF (1923)

The Futurists, under the leadership of Mayakovsky, placed themselves in 1918 at the service of the Revolution and became the LEF (Left Front)—and published a monthly review of that name. They regarded themselves as the vanguard of Communist art, and attempted to make LEF a laboratory for the working out of a new revolutionary art form. The LEF group, which united many of the literary innovators, like Chlebnikov and Pasternak, and which allied itself with the Formalist (scientific) critics like Brik, Shklovsky, Tinyanov, and Eichenbaum, though in every way a revolutionary group, came into frequent conflict with orthodox Marxist theoreticians and writers and had to fight its way with frequent defensive manifestos until its dissolution upon Mayakovsky's death in 1930.

OUR LITERARY WORK

By MAYAKOVSKY and BRIK

THE ancients divided literature into poetry and prose. And both poetry and prose had their own linguistic canons. Poetry: sugary metres (dactyls and spondees, and the stuffing of "blank verse"), a special "poetical" vocabulary (*steed* instead of *horse*; *youth* instead of *boy*, etc.; rhymes—humpty-dumpty), and its own little "poetical" themes (love, night, flames, smiths, etc.).

Prose had its particularly stilted heroes (he+she+lover=the novelists; intellectual+girl+policeman=the social novelists; somebody in grey+strange woman+Christ=the Symbolists) and its own literary style (1) "the sun sank behind the hill"="the poplars are rustling outside"; (2) "I tell you this . . ."+"the chairman of the orphanage drank vodka"="we shall see the sky bejewelled"; (3) "how strange, Adelaide too"+"the troubling secret"="crowned with mists of roses white").

And both the poetry and the prose of the ancients were equally far removed from colloquial speech, from the jargon of the street, and from the precise language of science.

We have now swept away the dust of verbal antiquity and shall only make use of fragments.

We refuse to see any distinction between poetry, prose, and everyday language.

We know only one material—the word—and we are using it in our immediate work.

We are working for the phonetic organization of the language, for polyphony of rhythm, for the simplification of verbal construction, for the invention of new thematic devices.

This work represents no purely æsthetic striving, but rather a laboratory for the best expression of contemporary facts.

We are no pontiff-creators, but master-executors of a social order.

The practical examples published in LEF are not absolute-artistic-confessions, but merely examples of our everyday work.

THE LEF AT WORK

ASSEYEV.—An attempt at a linguistic flight into the future.

KAMENSKY.—A play with the word in full phonetic range.

KRUTCHENYI.—An attempt to use jargon and phonetics for the formulation of anti-religious and political tendencies.

PASTERNAK.—The adaptation of a dynamic syntax to a revolutionary problem.

TRETYAKOV.—An attempt at a martial construction and the organization of revolutionary elements.

CHLEBNIKOV.—The attainment of maximum expressiveness by means of a colloquial language purified of former poeticalness.

MAYAKOVSKY.—An attempt at a polyphonic rhythm in poetry of an intensely social nature.

BRIK.—An attempt at a laconic prose on a contemporary theme.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivism, an offshoot of Futurism, was an attempt to lay down working principles for art regarded as an organic and rational function of collective society. The movement originated in 1922-23, and continued to attract attention until 1930. Ilya Selvinsky was its chief poet and theoretician. The present Manifesto was signed by Olga Chichagova in January 1923.

CONSTRUCTIVISM is not a current in art, as many think. Constructivism by its very nature repudiates art as a product of bourgeois culture. Constructivism is an ideology which originated in Proletarian Russia during the Revolution, and, like all ideology, Constructivism has a practical bearing only in so far as it creates its consumers. Hence the problem of Constructivism is the organization of a Communist environment by the creation of constructive man. Invention and technique are the two intellectual productive means to this end.

Intellectual-material production is composed of three elements: of tectonics, construction, and fabrication.

Tectonics, the ideological part of Constructivism, depends, on the one hand, upon the properties of Communism; on the other upon the expedient utilization of material.

Construction, the organizational function, elaborates every hypothesis to its conclusion.

Fabrication, the expedient utilization of material without limiting tectonics.

Constructivism is, by its nature, dynamic; the principles of to-day are displaced to-morrow in keeping up with new achievements of technique. Expediency must serve as criterion. Expediency must not, however, be confused with utilitarianism. What is utilitarian is not necessarily expedient.

We Constructivists repudiate art, since it is not expedient. It has always represented and represents the attainment of a minority.

Art is, by its nature, passive. It only reflects the actual. Constructivism is active. It not only reflects, it also acts.

To widen the scope of our activity, we Constructivists must strive to penetrate into all spheres of human culture, and, undermining all middle-class abutments from inside, we must organize new forms of existence by educating the new, constructive man.

ON GUARD

This group united in 1923 such of the Communist writers as thought that a strong Marxist and Proletarian position ought to be defended from the "bourgeois" tendencies of Soviet literature during the NEP period. The group counted among its contributors Averbakh, Bezimensky, Libedinsky, Karl Radek, Fritche, etc. The On Guard critics attacked writers like Pilnyak as well as Formalists like Brik and the leaders of the LEF. Whereas the Resolution of 1925 was a set-back for the On Guard critics, the promulgation of a Five-Year Plan in literature gave them the reins of power, and Averbakh became the virtual dictator of literature from 1929-32. The present Manifesto appeared in No. 1 of the On Guard review, June 1923.

EDITORIAL MANIFESTO OF THE ON GUARD GROUP

FOR a year already, ever since the appearance of N. Ossinsky's "notorious" articles, a literary-critical leap-frog has been going on in the U.S.S.R. Everybody who has, or imagines he has, some concern in artistic literature has been making his voice heard as the voice of ten. One Communist takes a liking for the nun-like Achmatova, another for the pornographically-slavophil Pilnyak, a third for the Serapion Brotherhood, with its "emancipation from ideology," and so geniuses are at hand, the Revolution is saved, and the Vikings, who are called upon to manage our revolutionary literature, are found. The most inexcusable muddle reigns in our own ranks upon all questions of literature. This must come to an end. We must stand for a firm and consistent Proletarian line in literature. The old battle flags must be once more proudly and unconquerably raised before the face of reviving bourgeois literature and the wavering Fellow-Travellers.

Art has always served and serves now as a mighty instrument of immediate influence upon the emotive impressionability of the masses. In the meanwhile, the Proletariat has achieved very little, almost nothing, in the sphere of art.

Proletarian literature is the one sphere in which the working-

class has succeeded in notably strengthening its position and in creating something of value. Proletarian writers have produced a whole series of works, which express the new interpretations and conceptions of the working-class, and which have given rise to a considerable literary movement. Nobody would undertake now to deny the existence of a Proletarian literature. Proletarian literature has acquired a definite social significance which was particularly manifest in the years of civil war, when the old writers either escaped abroad or entrenched themselves in pure art or middle-class niceties, while the younger bourgeois attempted various formal subtleties.

Through these years the voice of our Proletarian literature ran in unison with the Revolution and made itself heard even amid its thunders.

Given, however, the new conditions of revolutionary development, Proletarian literature ought to dig deeper and find new outlets. First of all, Proletarian literature must finally free itself from the influence of the past in the sphere of ideology as well as in that of form. The cultural backwardness of the Russian Proletariat, the century yoke of bourgeois ideology, the defeatist streak in Russian literature in the last years and in the decade before the Revolution—all this taken together inevitably influences, and makes possible further influence upon, Proletarian literature.

The framework of the content of Proletarian literature, which has had, until our days, two fundamental themes—labour and struggle—must be widened. To labour, it is necessary to add Proletarian construction, and to make a comprehensive use, in the artistic reflection of the struggle, of our heroically rich contemporaneity and of our great epoch. Nearer to living, concrete contemporaneity.

We must, at the same time, make use of the Proletarian past, so rich in struggles, defeats, and victories, and of the perspectives of its future conquests for the creation of a revolutionary Proletarian romanticism.

These important problems of the content of Proletarian literature demand of the Proletarian writer, besides the lyrical approach which has predominated in the last five years, an epic approach, which will alone permit us to create the monumental work adequate to the epoch. These problems of content, too,

compel the Proletarian writer to search for a corresponding form, which can only be synthetical.

Standing *On Guard* over our fundamental problem—the widening and deepening of the content, and the working out of a new synthetic form of Proletarian literature—we shall engage in merciless battle against both the stagnation and self-repetition of *several groups of Proletarian writers and the excessive pursuit of form* and its various elements.

While engaged on this work we shall stand firmly *on guard over a firm and clear Communist ideology* in Proletarian literature. In view of the revival, ever since the beginning of NEP, of the activity of bourgeois literary groups, all *ideological doubts* are absolutely *inadmissible*, and we shall make a point of bringing them to light.

We shall stand *on guard over the organizational structure* of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, and we shall fight for its consolidation.

We shall fight those Manilovs, who distort and slander our revolution by the attention they pay to the rotten fabric of the Fellow-Travellers' literary creation, in their *attempt to build an æsthetic bridge between the past and present*.

We *shall fight* those *diehards* who have, without sufficient criteria, congealed in ecstatic pose in front of the granite monument of *old bourgeois-gentry literature*, and who do not wish to emancipate the working-class of its oppressive *ideological burden*.

We *shall fight* those *desperate* people who, in search of the new, support all the acrobatics of literary juggling and propound theories of "the future," forgetting the present and sinking into the slime of flowery phrases.

And finally, as a public group in Proletarian literature, *we count it our duty to fight not only against manifest white-guard and finally discredited literary tendencies, but also against those writers' groups which disguise themselves with the false mask of revolution, but which are, in reality, reactionary and counter-revolutionary*.

A clear, firm, and severely consistent Communist policy in art and literature will be the leading principle of our review.

We have in our hands the battle-tried weapon of the proletariat—its Marxist method and the growing will of the working-

class for knowledge and creation—and we shall therefore be able to fulfil the task we have assumed.

The editors of *On Guard* will count principally upon the attention and the sympathetic interest of the wide mass of the Communist Party and of the working-class, of the Communist youth and proletarian students.

We count upon the support and active collaboration of all proletarian writers, of all comrade Communists and workers, working in the sphere of the artistic word or interested in it, and *we call upon them to join in a communal and united effort to build up proletarian literature and Communist solidarity, and to wage an unflagging struggle upon the ideological front.*

THE FORMAL METHOD

By O. M. BRIK

O. M. Brik is a leading Formalist critic, and one of the chief theoreticians of LEF. This article was published in September 1923.

OPOYAZ,¹ and its so-called "formal method," has become the bogey of all the literary priests and deacons. The bold attempt to approach poetic laws from the scientific point of view has provoked a storm of indignation. A "league of opposition to the formal method," or, to be more exact, a "league of resistance against the extirpation of poetic values" has been formed.

This latter would not be worth our attention were it not for the presence in its ranks of some stray Marxists. This necessitates an explanation.

OPOYAZ assumes that there are neither *poets* nor *writers*, but only *poetry* and *literature*. All that a poet writes is significant only as a part of his work in a common undertaking, and is absolutely worthless as the expression of his "ego." Once a poetical work is regarded as a "human document" or as a jotting from a diary, it may interest the author, his wife, relations, acquaintances, and the type of maniac that passionately pursues the question "Did Pushkin smoke?"—and nobody else. *The poet is a master of his craft. And no more. But to be a good master necessitates a knowledge of the requirements of those for whom the work is intended, and it necessitates, moreover, a participation in their life. Otherwise the work will not go forward or answer any need.*

The poet's social rôle cannot be understood from an analysis of his individual qualities and habits. *A general investigation into the devices of the poetic craft is essential*, and so is their distinction from the intertwining spheres of human endeavour and that of the laws of their historical development. Pushkin was not the founder, but only the chief of a school. Had there

¹ OPOYAZ—Society for Study of Poetical Speech. A pre-war society, which included most of the Formalist critics.

been no Pushkin, *Evgeniy Oniegin* would still have been written. America would have been discovered without Columbus.

We have, as yet, no history of literature. There exists only a history of the "generals" of literature. OPOYAZ, however, makes possible the writing of such a history.

The poet is a master of the word, a speech-creator, serving his class and social group. The consumer prompts him. *Poets do not invent themes*, they take them ready-made from their environment.

The poet's work begins with the working out of the theme, with the discovery of a corresponding literary form.

To study poetry is to investigate the laws of this literary process. *The history of poetry is the history of the development of the devices constituting its literary formation.*

Why poets have selected certain themes and not others can be explained by their membership of this or that social group, and bears no relation to their poetical work. This is a fact of importance in the poet's biography, but the history of poetry ought not to be a "biography."

Why poets, in working out their themes, have employed certain and not other devices, and how we may account for the emergence of a new device upon the death of an old—this is precisely the object of the most conscientious investigation on the part of scientific poetics.

OPOYAZ has isolated its work from that of similar scientific schools in no spirit of "retirement from the world," but rather to devote itself in all purity to the solution of a series of the most vital problems affecting man's literary activity.

OPOYAZ sets out to investigate the laws of poetic creation. And who dares to oppose this aim?

What does OPOYAZ contribute to the building up of Proletarian culture?

- (1) A scientific system to replace a chaotic jumble of facts and personal opinions.
- (2) A social criterion of creative personality to replace an idolatrous demonstration in the "language of the gods."
- (3) An understanding of the laws of creation to replace a "mystical" penetration into the "secrets" of creation.

OPOYAZ is the best educator of the Proletarian literary youth.

Proletarian poets still suffer from the thirst of "self-expression." They are all the time breaking away from their class. They are not satisfied to remain simply Proletarian poets. They look for "cosmic," "planetary," or "profound" themes. They seem to think that, thematically, a poet must break away from his environment, and only then will he be able to create something "eternal."

OPOYAZ will demonstrate to them that all greatness comes from answering the problems of the day, that the "eternal" is now and was once "actual," and that a great poet does not express himself, but merely executes a social command.

OPOYAZ will help its comrades, the Proletarian poets, to overcome the traditions of bourgeois literature by a scientific demonstration of the moribund and counter-revolutionary elements in their work.

OPOYAZ will help Proletarian creation, not by vague discussions about the "Proletarian spirit" and "Communist consciousness," but by a precise and technical demonstration of the devices underlying contemporary poetical creation.

OPOYAZ is the gravedigger of poetical idealization. Opposition to it is futile. Especially for Marxists.

MAXIM GORKY

By A. V. LUNACHARSKY

This is an extract from Lunacharsky's speech about Maxim Gorky delivered to the Moscow Soviet in May 1923, and reprinted on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Gorky as a writer in September 1932. Lunacharsky, the former Minister of Education, and himself a dramatist, was, with Trotsky, an active literary critic of moderate Marxist persuasion.

LOOKING closely into the life of these tramps, Gorky saw that the tramps split up into two fundamental types: the first type tended to become human tigers—these were the kings of thieves and prostitutes, the heroes of dirty bazaars with a predilection for crime, who, with all their magnificent muscles and masculine traits, remain moral idiots and cannot become social beings. They are, in reality, powerful birds of prey which ought to be exterminated, because it is impossible to reform them. They are the degenerates of individualism.

He noticed, on the other hand, among these tramps, the marvellous and attractive type, which found its complete expression in *Konovalov*. You will remember that magnificent scene in *Konovalov* in which, listening to the story of a death, he endlessly repeats: "Oh, how it must have pained him!"

These Konovalovs are wonderful people where sensibility and even dreams are concerned, but they are devoid of any strength; they are people who become tramps and drunkards because they are incapable of putting their dreams into action. And this in the end drives Konovalov to suicide. Such people prove Hamlets, good-for-nothings, entirely superfluous neurasthenic intellectuals.

These are the two fundamental types of sick individualists of this talented world of people who have turned their backs on society. No! What was necessary was not to turn one's back on society, but to find within it the granite, the electrified metal, capable of bringing about a revolution in its very organism. And Gorky gradually, but early, began to understand the revolutionary and constructive rôle of the proletariat. It was a

revelation for him. And he sings a hymn to his discovery, a hymn to the mighty camp of Revolution, a magnificent hymn, in his *Mother*.

And then there is his *Confession*, which is often attacked for its fundamental theme, which is that of a talented young peasant who goes in search of God, and becomes convinced that there is no God and cannot be one. But the world did not grow dim for him because he found no God; life did not appear sombre; for in place of God he had found man, and *factory* man in particular. The factory lights the country with its dawn, the factory offers that which will lead man out of his blind-alley.

In one of his latest excellent articles, Comrade Bucharin, borrowing a term from Kirilov, one of the oldest Proletarian writers, talks of the Iron Messiah.

It is this Iron Messiah, with its massiveness, its collectivity, its organization, with its revolutionary temperament and the force of its national, penetrating, and healthy energy, which roused Gorky's enthusiasm, and compelled him, the last of those prophets who only foretold the Revolution, and the first great writer to go over to the Proletarian movement, to say: "You are come into the world to save it!"

THE LITERATURE OF THESE YEARS

P. C. Kogan, an older Marxist critic of the so-called "orthodox" school reviews the achievements of the Revolution in literature in his The Literature of these Years (1924).

ABOUT BACTERIOLOGICAL BOMBS, WAR, LITERATURE, AND OTHER THINGS

... A LITERARY work is a social and not an individual phenomenon. It originates according to laws of inevitable necessity. To search for the author in an artistic work is to pay attention to secondary things. It is the equivalent of explaining the appearance of a railway or of a bridge in a given place by the engineer's inspiration, and not by the conjunction of economic conditions. The artist is a public associate whether or not he recognizes himself as such, and even if he thinks himself "the lord of his domain."

I am little attracted by formal investigation. I am not at all interested in Mayakovsky's syntax, discussions about composition, the image, the epithet, etc. These ought to be the preserve of the seminaries of philological faculties. And it is, first of all, the business of the poets, the specialists themselves. I have never been able to understand why these boring questions need be thrashed out before the public at large.

My mind resolves poetical images and interesting thoughts into combinations which, though original and unexpected, are yet the only fruitful and precious ones. Hauptmann's *Weavers* forms one group with the *Communist Manifesto*, and *The Sunken Bell* another with *Zarathustra*. I am not concerned with the fact that one is of dramatic, another of philosophic, and the third of sociological or economic form, or that the two plays were written by one author, and *Zarathustra* by another. I see only one means of differentiation and classification, one consumer, whose demand does, in the end, give significance to everything created by humanity. This consumer is collective man, who is consciously or unconsciously seeking organizational direction and guidance in so-called spiritual creations.

The middle-class or heroism; professional isolation or a thirst to identify oneself with the mass; the Olympian-poet or the poet-worker, public associate; irresponsible anarchism or discipline of thought; Nature or conscience; accident or plan; intuitive or free-will premises; mystical fear of Nature or technical supremacy over it; art for its own sake or art as factor of combat; aimless æstheticism or the image as a means to organization; heaven or earth; personality antagonistic to society or personality seeking to identify its calling with social necessity—these are the two conflicting armies of ideas, one of which defends the mouldering building of a dying world, and the other lays the foundations of future humanity.

All of us are still in the power of old habits of thinking and feeling, and, above all, of old temptations.

The enemies we have most to apprehend from, are not the Entente or the Counter-Revolution, but our own selves. The way of Savonarola, and not the way of Epicurus, will be ours for a long time to come. The pathos of renouncement and asceticism, the exaltation of repressed personality, the heart in love with humanity instead of with woman—that is the only spiritual atmosphere which will permit Communism to master contemporary consciousness. Communism in the practical sphere means no more than the perfected organization of production. In the spiritual sphere it is a mighty example of will and thought concentrated upon a single aim. The greatness of an idea is always measured by the number of heroes it gives birth to, by the willingness for sacrifice and by the force of concentration of the best properties of the human spirit. It is by this, more than by its economic plan, that Communism imposes itself. It is the moral strength of Communism that counts. The old world has gone bankrupt in face of it.

About Real Constructivism.—What is *Constructivism* in the real and not the LEF sense of the word? A Constructivist work has several characteristics.

The first: the author of such a work is not conscious of creating or “constructing” works of art. He is merely fulfilling an ordinary and necessary task. The first Greek choral-tragedians were probably constructivists of this kind. As they arranged their choruses, organized their strophes and antistrophes and embroidered upon current myths, they least of all experienced that creative process which was to become the lot of Shakespeare,

to say nothing of Leonid Andreyev. Solon, when he versified his laws, was another such constructivist, and so were the builders of the mediæval cathedrals.

A constructivist therefore fulfils his set task and is not conscious of creating that which historians will later class as art.

The second characteristic of Constructivism: it originates only in a period of the unified domination of interests, will, and consciousness in a vast collective. Such unity undoubtedly prevailed in the epochs we have cited. Thus constructive creation is, by its nature, collective.

The mistake of LEF consists in that it wishes to create in a laboratory that which is born in the process of production. It publishes a review, whereas it ought, in all logic, to drive the members of LEF to work in a factory. They ought, secondly, to forget that philology is a special science and ought rather to treat it as part of their general work.

. . . The first incomparable work of literary Constructivism was published in March 1917. Its authors were the Petrograd Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, and it was called *An Appeal to the Peoples of the World*. It contained, among others, the following words:

“ . . . We appeal to you. Cast off the yoke of your autocracies just as the Russian people has shaken off its Tsarist absolutism. Refuse to serve as instruments of coercion in the hands of kings, landowners, and bankers, and we shall, by our united efforts, put an end to the terrible slaughter which is a blot upon humanity and which overcasts the great days of the birth of Russian freedom. Workers of all countries, stretching our hands fraternally towards you over mountains of our brothers' corpses, over rivers of innocent blood and tears, over the smoking ruins of cities and villages, over the destroyed treasures of culture, we appeal for the revival and strengthening of international solidarity. Therein lies the pledge of our future victories and of the final emancipation of humanity. Proletarians of all countries, unite ! ”

These literary productions have, since October, appeared with increasing frequency. By the side of such exciting lyrics as the above-mentioned appeared marvellous satires, poem,

symphonies, dithyrambs, odes, etc. Yet they all originated from the offices of the Committee for International Affairs, of the Army Soviet, of the Soviet Congresses or those of the Communist Party of the Comintern, etc. Thus, while Sologub and Merizhkovsky were debating upon the best way of proffering spiritual consolation to their "weaker brethren," the proletariat was already creating mighty literary memorials, and was able to do so for the very reason that it had no time to preoccupy itself with literature as such, and that, ringed on all sides by enemies, it used the word as an offensive weapon on all the fronts, and as an instrument for the building-up of new forms of life.

THE RESOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY,
SPRING 1925

This resolution represents a NEP compromise of the Communist policy in the sphere of literature and the arts. The extremist Communist critics have now to bide their time until the promulgation of the Five-Year Plan permits them to seize the reins of literary power and pursue a militant policy.

“If the proletarian party until its coming to power encouraged class war and pursued a policy directed towards undermining the foundations of society, so now, in a period of proletarian dictatorship, the proletarian party is faced with the problem of establishing harmonious relations with the peasantry and of transforming this latter in the process; with the problem, too, of admitting a certain collaboration with the bourgeoisie whilst gradually eliminating it as a class; with the problem, also, of enrolling the technical and every other kind of intelligentsia to serve the Revolution and of winning it over ideologically from the bourgeoisie. . . . If the proletariat already possess unfailing criteria of the social-political content of any literary work, it still lacks such definite answers to all questions of artistic form. . . . The hegemony of proletarian writers is, as yet, nonexistent, and the party ought to help these writers to earn for themselves the historical right to such a hegemony. . . . Tact and care are essential in dealing with the Fellow-Travellers. The party must exhibit patience towards transitional ideological forms. . . . The party must vigorously oppose thoughtless and contemptuous treatment of the old cultural heritage as well as of the literary specialists. . . . It must likewise combat the tendency towards a purely hot-house proletarian literature. Criticism must show itself merciless towards counter-revolutionary manifestations in literature, as well as to all signs of wavering liberalism, etc., yet it must at the same time exhibit the greatest tact, care, and patience towards all literary groups, which might or will march together with the proletariat. Communist criticism ought to dispense with the tone of literary command. It will acquire profound and educational significance only when it will rely

upon its own excellence. . . . The party cannot bind itself to support any one tendency in the sphere of literary form. . . . The new style will be created by other methods, and the solution of this problem is not yet in question. . . . That is why the party ought to encourage the free competition of various groups and tendencies in a given sphere. . . . The party cannot admit by decree or proclamation any legal monopoly of literary production on the part of any one group or literary organization. . . . The party cannot give this monopoly to any group, not even to the proletarian group itself. . . . The technical achievements of the old masters must be considered, and a corresponding form, comprehensible to millions, must be worked out."

ZVEZDA (1926)

Georgyi Gorbachev, a Left-wing Communist critic, draws up a balance-sheet of literary achievement up to 1926 and attacks Voronsky's moderate policy. This article also appears in his book, Two Years of Literary Revolution (1924-26).

A BALANCE-SHEET

RUSSIAN literature in 1926 presents an entirely different picture from that in 1923, at the moment of the Pilnyak-Erenburg predominancy in our literary development. In spite of all the difficulties involved in drawing sharp social distinctions between various related writers, we may boldly divide contemporary literature into class groups.

On the left flank stands Proletarian Literature, already showing rapid ideological and artistic consolidation and quantitative increase. It treats of the most actual themes of contemporary society and follows the path of a healthy critical and revolutionary-spirited realism. Its future is assured, and it already has the considerable and growing attention of the more socially active mass of readers.

Next to Proletarian Literature comes the literature of the Fellow-Travellers, of writers, that is, reflecting the temper of the peasantry and of the revolutionary intelligentsia. From the artistic point of view, this group is still responsible for the best literary output. Its themes are less actual than those of Proletarian Literature, its attention is devoted in a greater degree to the past (chiefly to the recent past), and its resolution of problems is less daring than with proletarian writers. The Fellow-Travellers are submitting more and more to the ideological hegemony of the proletariat and of its literature, and are, in their turn, increasingly influencing proletarian writers by their technical achievements.

Next comes a group of writers who attempt to remain neutral in the social sense or who are as yet undecided about certain problems raised by the Revolution. These are either intellectuals who have not fully outlived the traditions of the past or people who are connected with wavering peasant elements. This group numbers some very considerable artists whom it is the ideological

task of Proletarian Literature to win over. At this "centre" begins the right flank of literature, which is, further, divided into two groups. The first comprises writers of a definite neo-bourgeois ideology (Ilya Erenburg, Alexei Tolstoy, Bulgakov) or reactionary gentry writers (Slonimsky, Zoshtchenko), or intellectuals become entangled in a net of reactionary ideology (Pilnyak). This group is evolving or lowering itself towards the demand of the "street." This group, however, might find a new lease of life under favourable *kulak* and NEP-man conditions, when its ranks would be swollen by new writers come from the left as well as the right groups. This latter, the extreme right group, comprises closely bound Soviet as well as old *émigré* bourgeois-gentry or new *émigré* writers (Aldanov). This reactionary group is writing less, more feebly, and has altogether lost actual significance, though, through its organization, the Writers' Union, it exercises a strong influence on all non-Proletarian writers.

The lines of the conflict are clearly demarcated. The conflict lies between the proletarian writers and the Fellow-Travellers really following them, and the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois reactionary literature; and their fight is for the reader, for social recognition, and for the wavering writers. Thus the worker-peasant-democratic-intellectual *bloc* is under the hegemony of the proletariat fighting the bourgeoisie, the bourgeois intelligentsia, and the *kulaks*. The worker-peasant *bloc* is manifestly winning, and the hegemony of the proletariat inside is consolidating itself.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party confirms this particular tendency of the day. The fact that it was not the Pilnyaks and the Tolstoys, but the writers of younger and fresher intellectual groups, who became the real Fellow-Travellers, and that these Fellow-Travellers so easily submit to proletarian influence, demonstrates once again the error of Voronsky's policy. Not only did he cede too much, but he ceded to those whom there was no need to support or attract, to those who are for ever lost to us. The *On Guard* group were not only theoretically and organizationally right in their fight against the "defeatism" of certain party theoreticians and editors in face of bourgeois literature, but even their most telling practices of iconoclasm have proved historically justified.

POETIC DICTION

By VICTOR SHKLOVSKY

Victor Shklovsky, author of The Sentimental Journey (1923), in which he describes his experiences during the Revolution, is also one of the leading theoreticians of the "Formalist" movement in criticism and a contributor to LEF. His most important critical work so far is his Theory of Prose (1929). He has also shown a particular interest in Sterne and has applied the "formal method" to Tristram Shandy.

POETIC diction, according to Aristotle, must be characterized by an element of strangeness and wonder. And in practice, poetic diction is very often a foreign importation—Sumerian with the Assyrians, Latin in mediæval Europe, Arabic in Persia, Ancient-Bulgarian as the basis of Russian literature—or a heightened diction, such as is found in folk-songs, and which is near to literary diction. To these we must add the widespread archaisms of poetic diction, the complications of the *dolce stil, nuovo*, Arnaut Daniel's obscure style and complex (*harte*) forms, which raise difficulties of pronunciation (*Diez. Lieben und Werke der Troubadour*, p. 213). L. Iakubinsky, in his article, has explained the law of the phonetic complication of poetical diction in the particular case of the repetition of identical sounds. Poetic diction is thus a difficult, complex, and tortured diction. In some cases the language of poetry resembles that of prose, but this does not violate the law of complexity.

"Tatiana was her name.
And we shall be the first
To light the tender page
Of romance with this name."

So wrote Pushkin. Derzhavin's lofty style was the current poetical diction for Pushkin's contemporaries, and Pushkin's style, by reason of its (then) triviality, struck them as unexpectedly complex. We have only to recall the horror Pushkin's contemporaries felt for the "commonness" of his expressions.

Pushkin used colloquial speech as a device for surprising attention in the same way as his contemporaries used Russian words in general in their habitual French speech (cf. examples in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*).

An even more characteristic phenomenon is now in process of manifesting itself. The Russian literary language, though by its origin alien to Russia, had so penetrated into the mass of the people that it had levelled out much in the vernacular dialects. Literature, on the other hand, began to exhibit a predilection for *dialects* (Remizov, Klueyev, Essenin, and others differing so much in talent, but having much in common in their deliberately provincial language) and *barbarisms* (which made possible Severyanin's school). Maxim Gorky is now on his way to changing over from the literary language to the idiom of Lieskovian speech. In this way colloquial speech and literary language have exchanged places (Viatcheslav Ivanov and many others). Finally, there is a strong tendency towards the creation of a new and special poetic diction; Victor Chlebnikov, as we know, headed this school. In this way we come to define poetry as a complex and oblique speech. Poetic diction is *constructed-diction*. Prose is ordinary speech: economical, light, and correct.

The position of those who believe that economy of effort is not only a feature but also a definition of poetic speech seems at first sight particularly strong where rhythm is concerned. Herbert Spencer's definition of the part played by rhythm—*"Beats repeated at irregular intervals compel us to hold our muscles in a state of unnecessary tension, for we cannot foresee the repetition of the beat; we economize effort when the beat is repeated at regular intervals"*—appears absolutely irrefutable. This seemingly convincing statement, however, suffers from the usual sin—from the confusion of the laws of poetical and prosaic diction. Spencer, in his *Philosophy of Style*, made no distinction between them, and yet there exist in all probability two kinds of rhythm. Prose rhythm, the rhythm of the working-song, the *dubinushka*, replaces when necessary words of command: to "pull together" also eases work by automatizing it. It is really easier to march to music than without it, just as it is easier to walk while conducting an animated conversation, when the act of walking is obliterated from our consciousness. In this way, prosaic rhythm is important as an automatizing factor. But the rhythm of

poetry is different. There is an "order" in art: yet not a single column of a Greek temple preserves an exact order, and art rhythm is no more or less than *a violation of prosaic rhythm*. Attempts have been made to systematize these violations. They constitute the present-day problem of the theory of rhythm. This systematization will, very likely, fail; for it is, in reality, a question not of a complex rhythm, but of the violation of a rhythm, and of one which, moreover, cannot be predetermined; if this violation were to become a canon it would lose all its force as a complicating device.

From *Art as Device: The Theory of Prose*, 1929.

THE SOCIAL COMMAND

By VIATCHESLAV POLONSKY

This is an extract from Polonsky's contribution to the heated dispute about "Social Command," which broke out in 1929 and in which a number of the most prominent critics and writers like Brik, Kogan, Gorbachev, Pereverzev, Gladkov, Pilnyak, Selvinsky, and Fedin took part. The dispute in question concerned the advisability of giving writers "social commands" or of setting them definite literary tasks. The following extract shows the arguments Polonsky, a moderate Marxist critic, brings to bear against this theory.

OUR task is to destroy the attitude which regards the artist as a bale of goods, to kill the critic as a middleman, and to abolish the situation which renders the artist a mere individual, condemned to make a trade of his gift to satisfy the necessities of distinct social groups, even if under the proud banner of the theory of "social command." We want the artist to be an organic part of the class, to form that sinuosity of the collective brain which by its position in the complex brain system is destined to express the æsthetic, psychological, emotional, and ideological necessities of Collective Man.

The theory of "social command" marks an attempt on the part of a group of extreme left writers and artists, who are torn off from the Proletariat, to establish a link with it while preserving their own independence as creators of ideological values. Having attributed to the working-class the rôle of "social commander" and inspirer, they themselves retain the humble rôle of "masters" of artist craft, of guardians of creative art devices, of makers of "ideological" things, though such a juxtaposition casts a doubt upon the value of their claims. They address themselves familiarly to the Proletariat, they strive to do away with intermediary critics who prevent their talking eye to eye with the Proletariat. It is not difficult to notice that, throwing, as they do, a bridge to the working-class, they in reality still remain on the "other bank." For the theory of "social command" does not create that *organic link* with the Proletariat, that close relationship, which would psychologically

have prevented their antithesis of "you and I"; and which would have inspired them with faith in themselves as the authentic and natural mouthpieces of the working-class. This organic welding with the working-class is precisely what the epoch demands of the master, who aspires to be the Proletarian artist of the Proletarian Revolution, and the Proletarian speaking-trumpet of our wonderful time.

1929.

RESOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE ALL-RUSSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

23rd April 1932

The application of the Five-Year Plan to literature in 1929 made for the virtual dictatorship of RAPP (see General Introduction) and its chief critic Averbakh, but by 1932 the discontent of the majority of Soviet writers and artists had become sufficiently manifest to win both Gorky and Stalin to the cause of a reform of the Soviet organizations, and the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party printed below abolishes RAPP and its affiliations.

1. THE Central Committee ascertains that, as a result of the considerable successes of Socialist construction, literature and art have, in the past few years, exhibited a considerable growth, both in quality and quantity.

Some years ago, when literature was still under the strong influence of certain alien elements, which were particularly flourishing in the first years of NEP, and when the ranks of Proletarian literature were still comparatively feeble, the party helped, by every means in its power, the creation of special Proletarian organization in the spheres of literature and art, with a view to strengthening the position of Proletarian writers and art workers.

Now that the rank and file of Proletarian literature has had time to grow and establish itself, and that new writers and artists have come forward from factories, mills, and collective farms, the framework of the existing Proletarian literary-artistic organizations (VOAPP, RAPP, RAMP, etc.) is becoming too confined and impedes the serious development of artistic creation. There is thus the danger that these organizations might be turned from a means of intensive mobilization of Soviet writers and artists around the problems of Socialist construction into a means of cultivating hermetic groupings and of alienating considerable groups of writers and artists, sympathizing with the aims of Socialist construction, from contemporary political problems.

Hence the necessity for a corresponding reconstruction of the

literary-artistic organizations and for the extension of the basis of their work.

Therefore the Central Committee resolves:

(1) To liquidate the association of Proletarian writers (VOAPP, RAPP);

(2) To unite all writers upholding the platform of the Soviet power and striving to participate in Socialist construction into a single Union of Soviet Writers with a Communist faction therein;

(3) To promote a similar change in the sphere of other forms of art;

(4) To entrust the Organizing Bureau with the working out of practical measures for the application of this resolution.

C.C.A.C.P.

LIST OF TRANSLATIONS OF SOVIET
WRITERS PUBLISHED
IN ENGLAND

LIST OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

BABEL, I.	RED CAVALRY	<i>Knopf</i>
EHRENBURG, J.	A STREET IN MOSCOW	<i>Grayson & Grayson</i>
FADEEV, A.	THE NINETEEN	<i>Martin Lawrence</i>
GLADKOV, F.	CEMENT	" "
GORKI, MAXIM	THE BYSTANDER	<i>Cape</i>
	DECADENCE	<i>Cassell</i>
	MAGNET	<i>Cape</i>
	REMINISCENCES OF L. ANDREYEV	<i>Heinemann</i>
	THROUGH RUSSIA	<i>Dent</i>
	DRIFT OF CIVILIZATION	<i>Allen & Unwin</i>
	MAN WHO WAS AFRAID	<i>Benn</i>
	MOTHER	<i>Appleton</i>
	NOTEBOOKS OF ANTON TCHEKOV	<i>Hogarth Press</i>
	THREE OF THEM	<i>Benn</i>
	TWENTY-SIX MEN AND A GIRL	<i>Duckworth</i>
	OTHER FIRES	<i>Appleton</i>
ILF, I., and } PETROV, E. }	DIAMONDS TO SIT ON	<i>Methuen</i>
	THE LITTLE GOLDEN CALF	<i>Grayson & Grayson</i>
IVANOV, V.	ARMoured TRAIN (a Play)	<i>Martin Lawrence</i>
KATAEV, V.	THE EMBEZZLERS	<i>Benn</i>
KOLLONTAI, A.	FREE LOVE	<i>Dent</i>
LEONOV, L.	SOT	<i>Putnam</i>
	THE THIEF	<i>Secker</i>
LIDIN, V.	THE APOSTATE	<i>Cape</i>
NEVEROV, ALEX-ANDER	TASHKENT	<i>Gollancz</i>
OGNYOV, N.	THE DIARY OF A COMMUNIST SCHOOLBOY	"
	THE DIARY OF A COMMUNIST UNDERGRADUATE	"
PANFEROV, F.	BRUSSKI	<i>Martin Lawrence</i>
PETROV, E., and } ILF, I. }	DIAMONDS TO SIT ON	<i>Methuen</i>
	THE LITTLE GOLDEN CALF	<i>Grayson & Grayson</i>
PILNYAK, B.	THE VOLGA FLOWS DOWN TO THE CASPIAN SEA	<i>Peter Davies</i>
REMIZOV, A.	THE CLOCK	<i>Chatto & Windus</i>

REMIZOV, A.	THE FIFTH PESTILENCE AND THE TINKLING CYMBAL	<i>Wishart</i>
ROMANOV, PAN- TELEIMON	WITHOUT CHERRY BLOSSOM THREE PAIRS OF SILK STOCK- INGS	<i>Benn</i>
	THE NEW COMMANDMENT (in preparation)	"
	ON THE VOLGA (in preparation)	"
SCHISCHKOV, V.	CHILDREN OF DARKNESS	<i>Gollancz</i>
SHOLOHOV	SILENT FLOWS THE DON	<i>Putnam</i>
TARASOV - RODIO- NOV, A.	CHOCOLATE	<i>Heinemann</i>
TOLSTOY, A.	IMPERIAL MAJESTY	<i>Elkin Mathews</i>
TRETIAKOV, S.	ROAR CHINA (a Play)	<i>Martin Lawrence</i>
VOINOVA	GLITTERING STONES	<i>Heinemann</i>

ANTHOLOGIES

COURNOS, JOHN (Editor)	SHORT STORIES OUT OF SOVIET RUSSIA	<i>Dent</i>
KONOVALOV, S. (Editor)	BONFIRE: STORIES OUT OF SOVIET RUSSIA	<i>Benn</i>
Chosen and translated by:		
DEUTSCHE, BABETTE, and YARMO- LINSKY, A.	RUSSIAN POETRY	<i>Martin Lawrence</i>

The above is a list of creative literary works which have so far been translated in this country. Much more of historical, critical, and economic interest has also appeared in translation: notably, the Complete Works of Lenin, now in course of publication by Martin Lawrence; various works by Stalin, from the same firm; and Literature and Revolution by Trotsky (Allen & Unwin), his Autobiography and his History of the Russian Revolution (both by Gollancz).

